SCOTLAND
John Haldane

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

July 14, 2000

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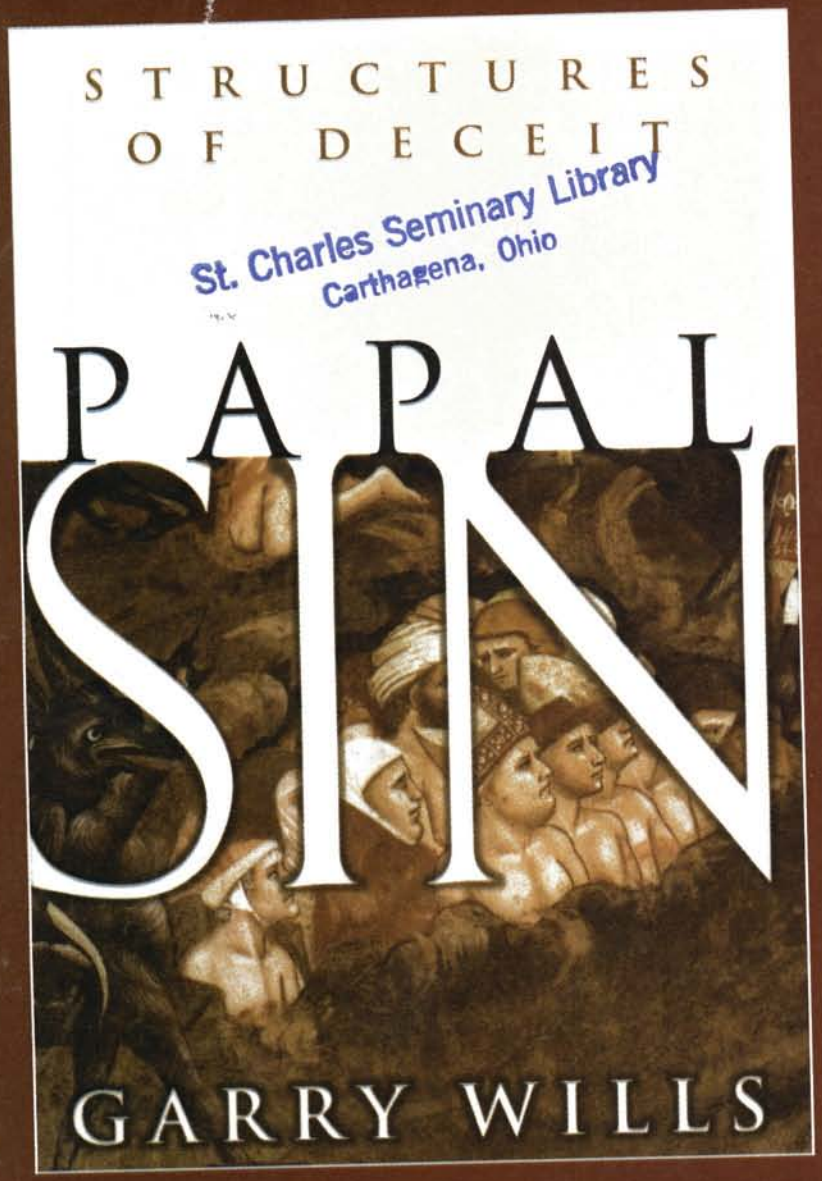

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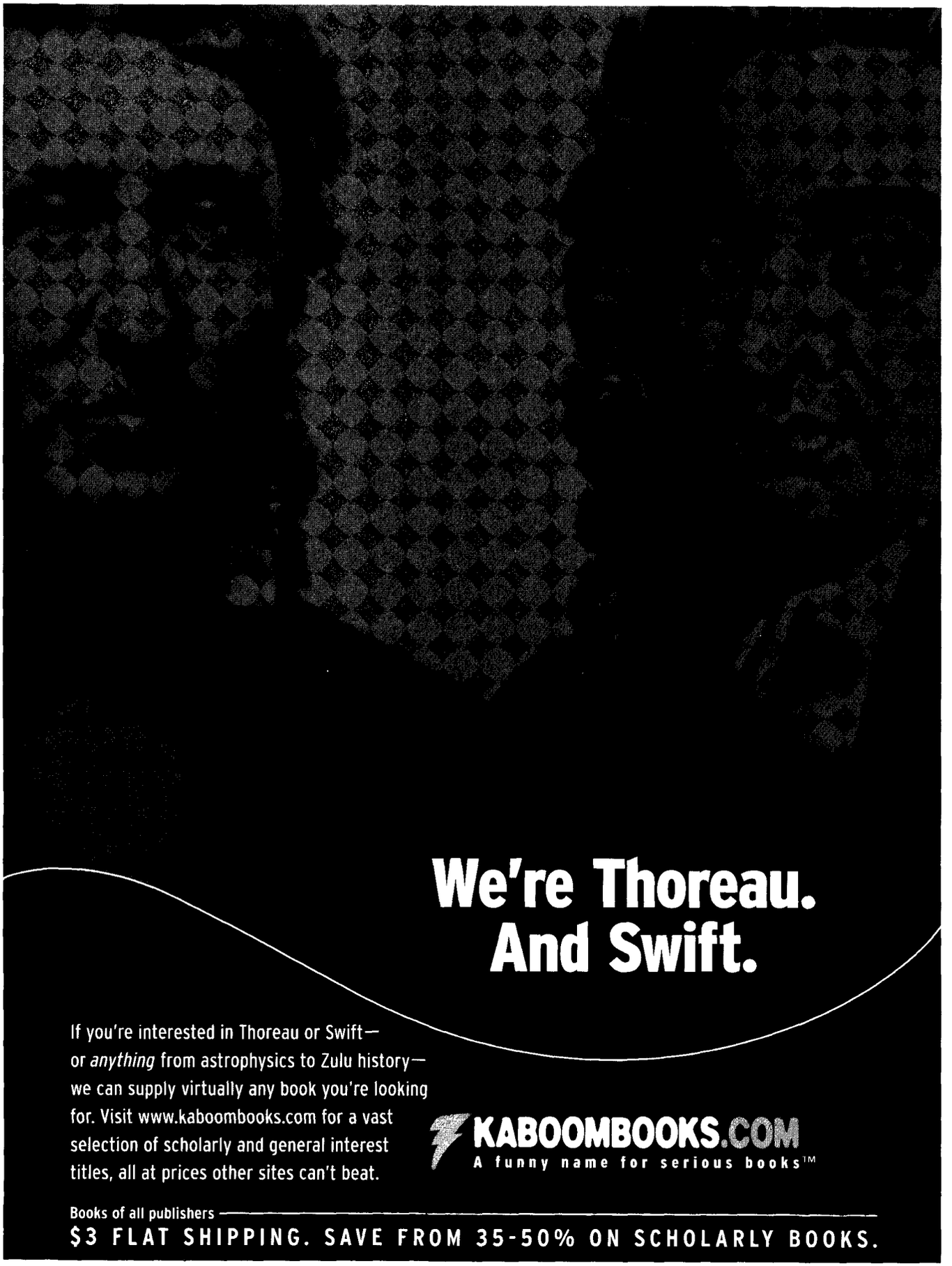
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COMMONWEAL

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To the Editors

Short & sweet

The unsigned "Et Cetera," "Message in a Bottle" [June 16], is a literary gem.

HELEN M. HARVEY
Brooklyn, N.Y.

The working poor

Three cheers for your editorial on the working poor [June 16]. Your parting line says, "Building on what already works is the best way to include the poor in the prosperity enjoyed by the majority of their fellow citizens." How true! Unfortunately, good steps pending in Congress are in danger of being lost to end-of-the-year budget haggling. A $1 increase in the minimum wage would immediately help more working families put food on the table. The bipartisan Hunger Relief Act would remove some outdated and unreasonable barriers to the food stamp program. Neither piece of legislation would come close to breaking the bank. In this booming economy, it's unthinkable that we should not lend a helping hand. If not now, when?

AIMEE MOISO
Silver Spring, Md.

The writer works for Bread for the World, a Christian antihunger lobbying organization.

A better idea

Thank you for your editorial ["Something New," June 2] drawing attention to the projected Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies[IACS]; its foundation needs to be given wide attention and support. For some years I tried to sell the idea of a national high-level Catholic "think tank"; for several reasons it did not sell. Now I am glad that it did not, for the IACS is a better idea. If it succeeds it can help realize much of what Christopher Ruddy and his sympathetic critics [*see* same issue] agree on as the goal of Catholic intellectual life in this country.

As someone who has worked in the area of Catholic theology for some time, I hope the new institute can catalyze creation of a genuine theology of culture that can bridge the gulf between an educated grasp of Christian faith and so much of the secular and alienated intellectual world of our day. If it is able to accomplish this, the institute can truly create common ground within the church and between the church and "the world." IACS can also be a valuable resource for encountering positively the challenges of a church opening up to the non-European parts of the globe. Another hope: that such high-level reflection on Christian thought can be alert to the richness of Latino and Latin American theology, which is only beginning to touch theological activity in the United States.

Finally, I could not agree more with your remarks that the kind of research and reflection envisaged for the institute must embrace such things as the arts, literature, and the professions; without this interaction, theology itself cannot flourish.

BERNARD COOKE
San Diego, Calif.

Globalization & the poor

As a long-time reader of *Commonweal*, I found the feature article by Jay R. Mandle ["Trading Up," June 2] a great disappointment—especially the headline on the front cover, "Why Globalization Is Good for the Poor." I am not opposed to globalization, which I believe is an inexorable process driven by the determination of capital to maximize profit. Profit itself, of course, is not sinful. But to subordinate everything else to it may well approach the "structures of sin" so often decried by Pope John Paul II and others.

Mandle concedes that globalization entails social and environmental costs, but subordinates these to the apparently overriding values he sees in international trade. He finds the "left-leaning critics of globalization" like William Greider, Lori Wallach, and Ralph Nader as unpersuasive as I find his selective economic data table. I think he misreads the intent of the anti-World Trade Organization demonstrators in Seattle and the anti-International Monetary Fund/World Bank demonstrators in Washington. They would indeed like to close down the WTO, and perhaps the Bank and the Fund as well, not so much because of what these institutions do, but because of how they do it, who benefits, and who decides.

Another point. Mandle's comments about "unrestrained activity of financial managers" suggest that global finance, rather than the traditional production-consumption relation (and surely not demand), drives the market. But there is no discussion of the dominant power of capital or of managing capital flows in terms of the common good. Similarly, there is a note that "disruptions must be managed in order not to burden those least able to adjust." But why not try to prevent these disruptions in the first place? The article says that the world's poor should not be asked "to wait for new global rules to be adopted," but it does not deal with the reasons why such rules cannot be adopted faster.

Finally, the article appears to identify "improvements in overall human well-being" with economic growth. Neither I nor the protesters nor a lot of other people would agree with that view. I was also saddened not to find the word "justice" anywhere in the text. All this having been said, it occurs to me that you should offer an open forum on the issue of globalization in the light of Catholic social teaching.

MARTIN MCLAUGHLIN
Washington, D.C.

Trading up?

In his article on globalization and the poor, Jay R. Mandle acknowledges that those who demonstrated against

(Continued on page 28)

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The cost of democracy

Newt Gingrich Republicanism is not dead. Last month the Republican-controlled House of Representatives passed a bill that would eliminate the estate, or inheritance, tax. Fortunately, the chances of the bill becoming law are slim. It is unclear what the Senate will do, and President Bill Clinton has vowed to veto the bill should it get to his desk later this year. Still, the issue had enough political potency to attract the votes of sixty-five Democrats, and George W. Bush, the presumptive Republican candidate for president, strongly supports the effort to end what so-called reformers call the "death" tax. It says something troubling about the state of our politics that inheritance taxes, in many ways the symbolic linchpin of the very idea of progressive taxation, are now under concerted attack. Repealing the estate tax is an idea that should be resisted on political, fiscal, and moral grounds. More than money is at stake.

Those urging that the tax be abolished argue that the dead shouldn't be taxed and that, moreover, the assets involved have previously been taxed as income. They like to complain of double or even triple taxation. Abolitionists further contend that estate taxes place a debilitating burden on those who wish to pass on family farms or businesses to their children.

None of these objections bears up under scrutiny. First, the tax is not levied on the dead but on their estates and thereby on their heirs. In other words, those who receive the windfall, not those who earned the money, are the real object of the tax. If we want a tax system designed to reward work—as critics of "handouts" to the poor never tire of saying—taxing large "gifts" makes sense. Inheritance taxes shouldn't be confiscatory, but neither should the cries of penury from beneficiaries be taken at face value.

Second, most of the assets subject to the estate tax come in the form of unrealized capital gains and tax-exempt bonds. Usually, neither of these forms of wealth has been taxed before.

Finally, the current law already makes ample provision for alleviating the tax burden of those inheriting family farms or businesses. Only 1 percent of the inheritance tax is collected from family farms, and less than 1 percent from family businesses. Perhaps the law should be reformed to lighten the burden on farmers and small businesses even more—a bill offered by the Democrats to do precisely that was defeated—but the idea that the estate tax is depriving people of their heritage and livelihood is false.

The truth of the matter is that only the very wealthiest pay estate taxes. Americans can inherit $675,000 from each parent (or anyone else) without paying any tax at all. The figure will soon rise to $1 million. Only the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans face inheritance taxes, and that means only the wealthiest will benefit from the tax's repeal. According to the *Wall Street Journal*'s Albert Hunt, 2,400 estates paid nearly half of all estate taxes in 1997. Repealing the tax would result in these heirs getting average tax breaks of $3.4 million. These are not marginal business people or farmers struggling just to get by.

Worse, repealing the tax would deprive the government of $50 billion a year in revenue. That money will have to be made up somehow—current revenue sur-

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In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated August 11.

pluses will not continue indefinitely—and that means that those less able to pay will be asked to pay more at a time when the well-off have never had it so good.

Americans believe that those who work hard and succeed should be rewarded. The opportunity to get rich is understood to be a kind of American birthright, and countless immigrants have come to this country seeking such opportunities while fleeing systems of inherited wealth and power. Enormous concentrations of wealth can easily foreclose on that birthright. A progressive tax system insures that those who have benefited most from this nation's freedoms contribute their proportionate share to keep opportunity available for those who come after them. Income inequality in the United States is already at scandalous rates and threatens to increase. Repealing the estate tax would exacerbate that trend.

Even more important, a progressive tax system is a fundamental principle of democracy. Great concentrations of wealth, especially when money is the lifeblood of political campaigns, fatally distort the democratic process itself. Power in the hands of only a few places the levers of government too far from the mass of people. As the siren call of "prosperity" comes to dominate political discourse, too little attention is being paid to the egalitarian premises and unfulfilled hopes of American democracy. When a candidate from one of the nation's two principal political parties advocates what amounts to the repeal of progressive taxation, citizens should pay close attention. It's not just our wallets that are at risk.

ET CETERA

STRUCTURES OF DECEIT ■ When America's most prominent Catholic intellectual writes a scathing indictment of his church, it's news. Whether it's old news or not depends on the nature of the argument and the reliability of the evidence marshaled to support the case being made. Garry Wills's new book, *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit*, is a passionate polemic that will please some, outrage others, and disappoint still more (*see*, Eamon Duffy's review, page 24). Wills's intellectual range is legendary and his forensic skills formidable, but he is not infallible; reasonable people can dissent from his particular ecclesiological and ideological agenda. That idea was conspicuously missing from the celebratory review *Papal Sin* received from the pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty in the *New York Times Book Review* (June 11). Rorty, well known for his hostility to institutional religion, objective morality, and all other putatively "conservative" forces, seemed an odd choice to assess the accuracy and persuasiveness of Wills's book on Catholicism's intellectual corruption. Not surprisingly, the only critical comment Rorty could muster concerned Wills's failure to come to the logical conclusion that the church should be abolished altogether. Rorty seemed honestly befuddled as to why anyone would bother taking the Catholic church seriously in the first place.

It's a point of view, but not a terribly helpful one, especially for the reviewer of a book like *Papal Sin*. Will the *NYTBR* extend this policy of selecting transparently biased reviewers to works on equally contentious subjects? Will Hilton Kramer, who has made a career out of excoriating his former employer, review the next exposé of the structures of deceit at the *New York Times*? Or better still, why not have Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, that scourge of relativism, review Richard Rorty's next effort? Now that would be provocative. Some would even call it ecumenical.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

JO McGOWAN

'THINKING' CATHOLICS

An old slur that never dies

A few months ago, I read a wonderful story ("The Perfect Child," London *Sunday Telegraph*, March 5) about a woman in England named Caroline Armstrong-Jones. The sister-in-law of Lord Snowden and the wife of one of Britain's wealthiest businessmen, she was in the news not because of her connections or her lifestyle, but because of her children. Her daughter, India, age three, had been born with Down syndrome. During her second pregnancy, Armstrong-Jones had been put under enormous pressure to have amniocentesis done to determine whether this child would be similarly afflicted, with the obvious assumption that she would then abort him if he were.

Her reaction to this suggestion was an incredulity that was both astonishing and delightful: how could anyone, she asked in so many words, imply that there was anything wrong with India? And were she to abort India's little brother if he happened to be like her, wouldn't she be rejecting India as well?

The article is worth reading just for the confident and articulate way in which Armstrong-Jones demolishes every argument brought against her position, but what I found more interesting was the bias of the journalist who wrote the piece.

Although he obviously found his subject both impressive and appealing, there was one little problem with her argument: Armstrong-Jones is a Catholic. To protect her from the usual treatment an

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anti-abortion Catholic can expect to receive, he assured his readers that *her* position was different. "Although deeply religious (Caroline's Roman Catholic faith is extremely important to her), her position on abortion is a *personal* one."

Whew. For a moment there, I thought Armstrong-Jones was just another one of those brainwashed Catholics, a victim of genetics and the pope, lurching through life without a single thought of her own, mindlessly spouting the party line whenever the subject of abortion came up. What a relief to discover that her position was not anything she believed, but was in fact *personal*.

My own views on abortion have been similarly dismissed more times than I can count by thoughtful, apparently intelligent people, simply because I am a Catholic. Somehow this fact gives them permission to disregard logic, reason, and even courtesy. A Catholic arguing against abortion has nothing to say. No argument, no matter how arresting, provocative, or original is worth considering if it is the product of a Catholic mind. It goes without saying that the argument is tainted, beneath consideration because of its source, because it is clear that it has been never formulated but simply swallowed whole, along with the Virgin Birth and the Incarnation.

For many years I was at pains to reassure my accusers that I had indeed worked this out myself and that my being Catholic had nothing to do with my opinion. Now, however, I am more secure. Of course I am a Catholic, I say proudly. What else? Quakers are not asked to come up with additional, non-Quaker reasons for their pacifism; Hindus are not expected to produce non-Hindu arguments for their vegetarianism. Why should Catholics go to all the effort of finding non-Catholic support for their stand on abortion? Especially when the Catholic line is so convincing and well-developed! And not only that, but we believe it.

What is a belief, after all? I find it amusing the way so many people suppose that religious belief precludes thought, almost as if one has neither the right nor the ability to think through the articles of the faith one professes. When I argue with non-Catholics about an issue like abortion, I see a kind of pitying look in their eyes, as if they think me a pathetic victim of my upbringing, hopelessly conditioned to repeat the same tired phrases over and over, denied by destiny the chance to make an independent decision.

To be a mature Catholic adult means that one assents to the commonly held beliefs of the religion. Assent can only happen after serious and thoughtful consideration, weighing different viewpoints and making a decision in the light of faith. It is not possible to be held hostage in a genuine religion, Catholic or otherwise, for belief is meaningless if it is forced. It is a contradiction in terms. Belief is also meaningless if it is mindless. We cannot believe simply because the pope or a priest or a nun says so. That is a childish faith and not an option for an adult.

The secular alternative, the personal belief, is fine as far as it goes, but that isn't very far. The problem with working out every position autonomously is that we are human beings and all too likely to adjust reality to fit our particular situation at the moment. The power of a belief which is held in common over generations is that it has stood the test of time; it has history. Each person coming to maturity, however, must grapple with it anew and either accept it or reject it. The struggle is an important part of the actual belief and it is equally important that that process be acknowledged. Catholics inherit a treasure when they embrace the faith, but if it comes unexamined, it doesn't amount to much.

A Catholic who knows what she possesses, who has studied it all before saying "Amen," has far more than a personal position: she has a belief. It's all that is needed to change the world. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

E.J. DIONNE, Jr.

FOLLOW THE (TAX) MONEY

The difference between Bush & Gore

Al Gore's campaign has gone through so much public reinvention that the proposal he made in June to subsidize private retirement accounts for the poor and the middle class was quickly denigrated as copycat politics. George W. Bush's campaign has done a fine job poking fun at all the Gore transformations—Bush folks like to talk about Gore, Version 6.0 and counting. It spun the new Gore idea as a pale imitation of Bush's idea of carving private accounts out of Social Security.

It's smart spin, but it's not true. The distinction between Gore and Bush on this issue speaks to the fundamental differences between these two candidates. They are differences Bush has wisely been playing down and Gore's campaign has failed to highlight.

Take the retirement plan. Bush wants to take two percentage points out of the Social Security tax and allow people to use the money to set up private accounts. Many things can be said about this, but two are especially salient. First, that lower-income people, by definition, will get less out of their 2 percent than better-off people who pay the full Social Security tax. Second, that reducing the amount of money flowing into Social Security will inevitably require cuts of some kind in future benefits. Bush is honest enough to promise only that he will make no cuts in benefits to those now in or near retirement.

Gore leaves the Social Security system intact, but adds a new retirement benefit heavily tilted in favor of those with modest incomes. Under the plan, outlined by top Gore aide Ron Klain, couples earning under $30,000 a year will see the government put up $3 for every dollar they saved. If a couple earning $29,000 managed to scrape togeth-

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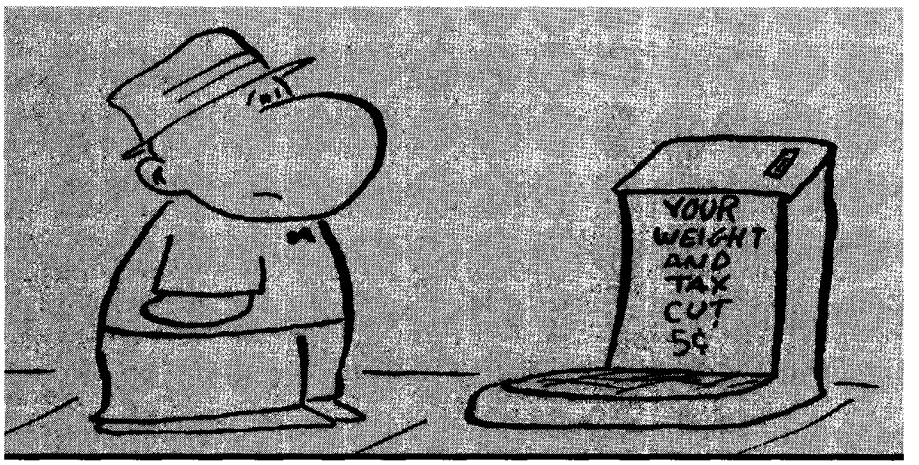

er $1,000 in savings, the government would add $3,000 to their account. If they could save only $300 a year, the government would put in $900.

The government match for the savings by couples earning $30,000 to $60,000 a year would be dollar-for-dollar. And for the higher end of the middle class (couples earning between $60,000 and $100,000) the government would put up a dollar for every $3 saved. For unmarried individuals without children, Klain said, the match is the same but the income ceiling in each category is cut in half. The accounts are capped at $2,000 a year for individuals, $4,000 for a couple.

The difference between Gore and Bush is that Gore gives larger benefits to those at the bottom of the income structure than to those at the top. Gore's plan embraces the strongest argument of Social Security privatizers—that low-income people should be given a chance to build wealth—without buying the idea that a wealth-creation plan needs to be carved out of Social Security.

The larger differences between Bush and Gore can be seen in their overall tax plans. Gore's potpourri of tax reductions flow primarily to the middle and bottom. Bush's big income tax cuts concentrate benefits at the upper end, for the simple reason that upper-income people pay the most in income taxes.

Here is the great underreported fact about the 2000 campaign: Bush is far more conservative than his sunny and compassionate speeches would suggest. That has largely been lost, even though Bush isn't hiding anything. But it has not been lost on shrewd conservatives.

The lead editorial in the July 3 issue of *National Review*, the conservative flagship magazine, is headlined "The Right Choice" and it rejects the idea that Bush has mechanically "moved to the center." Bush, the magazine correctly notes, "has been reliably conservative on the issues that matter."

"The two issues to which Bush has devoted the most time since winning the primaries are free-market reform of Social Security and missile defense," the editors write. "Both are conservative priorities, and both are bolder policies than previous Republican presidential candidates have advocated." Tellingly, the magazine goes on to note that Bush's "support for tax cuts and Social Security reform is more important than his spending initiatives—not least because if he succeeds on taxes and Social Security, it will be easier to limit government in the future."

As the good conservatives at *National Review* understand, the central issue in this campaign is how to use the money from the federal surplus that's left over after debt reduction. Will it be used for broad-based tax cuts that especially help the well-off, or for tax reductions and spending programs to help those in the middle and below who haven't fully shared in the economic boom? You wonder how forcefully and explicitly Gore will be willing to make his side of that case. □

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John Haldane

CATHOLIC SCOTLAND?

Well, partly.

In May 1999, Scotland went to the polls to elect members of the newly created Scottish Parliament. Contrary to the impression of some in the United States, Scotland has not become an independent state. It remains part of the United Kingdom, but now has something akin to a state legislature. The predictable result of the elections was that parties of the left and center-left formed the majority. However, while Catholicism has traditionally been associated with the Socialist Labour party, Cardinal Thomas Winning of Glasgow suggested recently that this historical connection could no longer be taken for granted. His immediate concern was to alert Labour to the danger of pursuing policies at odds with Catholic values. More generally, however, Scotland's historical-political allegiances and traditional class, ethnic, and religious divisions have diminished. As a result, the future is unlikely to have the settled patterns of the past.

Christianity came to Scotland with Saint Ninian at the end of the fourth century and established itself in a series of settlements. One of the most ancient of these is Saint Andrews, from where I am writing. To the north of my study lie cliff-caves reputed to have been inhabited by eighth-century Christian hermits—the Culdees (*Celidé*: "Friends of God"). Atop the cliffs stand the ruins of the medieval cathedral, in its glory one of the largest in Christendom and the destination of pilgrims from throughout Europe, come to venerate the bones of the Apostle. Looking southward I can see the fifteenth-century tower of the university's Saint Salvator's Col-

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lege chapel. In a recess on one side of the sanctuary lies the tomb of the college founder, Bishop Kennedy, and across from it stands the pulpit of John Knox: testaments to the old Catholic faith and the new reformed one. A street away, Holy Trinity Church houses a memorial to Archbishop Sharp, murdered in 1679 by "Covenanters" (Presbyterian opponents of the Episcopalian tendency).

The "Celtic" influence on Christianity in America has been profound. The impact of Irish immigration on American Catholicism needs no mention, and that of the Scots on Protestantism is well known via the association of Presbyterianism with Scottish settlement in the American Northeast, South, and Midwest. In consequence, the popular tendency in the States is to think of Ireland as Catholic and Scotland as Protestant. But today the situation is more complex. First, Ireland has significant non-Catholic populations and is rapidly secularizing. Also, Scotland is now religiously diverse, with Catholicism a major player.

Scottish Christianity is still broadly divided among Catholicism, Presbyterianism, and Episcopalianism, but the years since the Reformation have seen a reversal of fortunes. Though all but destroyed in that religious revolution, Catholicism is now the largest worshiping denomination (thanks largely to immigration—principally from Ireland) with 750,000 souls, a third of whom attend Mass on Sunday. In a country with a population of 5.5 million, these are significant numbers. The Kirk (the Church of Scotland), by contrast, has suffered a fairly dramatic decline, though it remains a force, particularly within the older professions and the social establishment.

Unlike the Church of England, however, the Kirk is not an "established" church. Rather it enjoys the lesser standing of being legally "protected." As in the United States, Episcopalianism is a small and largely middle-class denomination, strongest in the more affluent areas—principally the capital, Edinburgh.

There is no *primus* in the Scottish Catholic church, though there are two metropolitans. The sees of Edinburgh and Saint Andrews in the east, and of Glasgow in the west have been co-equals since the Middle Ages. However, Cardinal Winning is chairman of the episcopal conference and the de facto leader of Scottish Catholics. In a list of the "Scottish Power 100" published in 1999, he was ranked eleventh among the most powerful figures in the country—one place ahead of the leader of the Scottish National party, and the *only* religious figure of *any* denomination or faith included in the list. His influence reflects both the size of the Catholic population and his own willingness publicly to reaffirm traditional moral teaching on such matters as social justice, abortion, and same-sex relationships. In regard to the latter, he is now perceived as giving voice to general public sentiment and increasingly is coming to be seen, even by opponents—as in England was the late Cardinal Basil Hume of Westminster—as the national voice of Christianity.

With sectarianism in decline and Catholic participation in the professions increasing, Roman Catholics in Scotland can hope to make a significant contribution to the development of Scottish politics and culture. The question, however, is what ideals they can offer the new Scotland. One is the concept of society as a moral community in which responsibilities stand alongside rights, in which material goods are produced with an eye to social benefit as well as to profit, and in which the value of life is respected and its quality promoted. Intellectually and culturally, the Catholic contribution should be to challenge materialism, instrumentalism, hedonism, and short-term gratification, and to present in a Scottish context the central ingredients of a Catholic philosophy of culture.

Across the Irish Sea in Ulster, parties representing Irish republicans and UK unionists (largely of Scottish Protestant extraction) have once again taken their seats in the recently created Northern Ireland Assembly. After a quarter-century of murderous intercommunal violence, the two traditions are negotiating peaceful modes of co-existence and seeking to develop new forms of association with the Irish Republic and the British mainland. Looking to the future, it is possible to hope that, as in Scotland, religious and political differences will no longer be aligned in Ulster.

Whether or not they lead eventually to political separation from the United Kingdom, the timing of Northern Irish and Scottish devolution seems providential: an opportunity and a challenge to develop new political orders and to re-establish the influence of Christianity upon two Celtic peoples. □

John Haldane *is professor of philosophy and senior fellow of the Center for Philosophy and Public Affairs at the University of Saint Andrews. He has written frequently for the* London Times, *the* Glasgow Herald, *and the* Tablet.

Such Deaths

Having crossed so many seas,
tapped at so many windows
in the night, discovered us often,
often alone and waiting, he shows
no surprise nor mercy. Or is
this wail her lullaby
and La Llorona is the mother/father?
All her words bat our heads
back and forth, leave us stupid
with froth on our lips. Is this
her way of beating the clothes
white on the river rocks?
We shout out, frenzied, and demand
that nothing should be pegged to its destiny.

Carol Hamilton

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LANDSCAPE & MEMORY

On the death of my parents

John A. Lynch

Anything in our house of age or memory or antique value—furniture, glassware, or curio—came through my mother, born in Detroit in 1889 and descended from French-Canadians who, in the 1600s, first established themselves along the waterfront in Sandwich, Ontario, across the Detroit River. My mother lived her entire life in Detroit. She was the last of four children and stayed home to be with her mother after her father died. She did not finish high school. She never had a job. She never learned to drive a car, and she remembered indelibly through her mother and grandmother accounts of Indians and missionaries.

From my father's house there was only an old photograph, taken in 1895 at the family farm in Newport, New York, when he was seven. The family stands before its two-story clapboard house. The cuffs on the sleeves of my father's jacket are halfway to his elbows, his haircut fashioned with a bowl. My father graduated from Colgate University—the only one of six siblings to go beyond high school—moved to Michigan at the urging of a classmate, and studied at the Detroit College of Law. He served in the 88th Division in World War I. By a coincidence of logistics, when in 1944 I reached Italy as an infantry replacement in World War II, I was assigned to the 88th.

My parents died in their eighties. Their disparate lives came together in Michigan, melded there as one, and they never left the state. They came from another era. The farthest they commonly traveled was to the cemetery in Sandwich where my mother's ancestors lay buried.

My wife and I were married in 1948 and have lived in California, Michigan, Indiana, and Massachusetts. My parents would not have understood all that we have known, but reluctantly and surely I am approaching my own octogenarian years. As I do so, memories of my parents become sharper in some ways.

At Lake Oakland, northwest of Pontiac, where we sought refuge from Detroit summers, my father could plant carrots at the end of June and harvest them before we went back to the city. His tomato plants magically grew four feet tall in the sand. During the years of World War II he had cultivated a victory garden in a vacant lot, in addition to his own backyard garden. He mowed the lawn and shoveled his sixty feet of sidewalk in winter, but was a little awkward and more careful than when he was younger. But he was in good health. When he had just turned eighty-two we were still putting up the storm windows together, I flying from Boston to Detroit for the visit. But he no longer drove his car and it sat in the garage on softening tires. I expected that he might live forever, if there were time.

For nineteen years our family lived on Westminster Avenue near the geographical center of Detroit, a block and a half east of Woodward Avenue, the city's main thoroughfare. There was a public school on Kenilworth, the next street south, but that was off limits, and we walked three blocks in the opposite direction to attend the Catholic schools on Belmont Avenue.

A fire company on Woodward used our street as a passageway on its eastward runs and trucks clanged regularly through the neighborhood day and night. We were restricted by parental rule to two or three adjoining streets, except to walk cautiously beyond cross-streets on the way to school or to visit school (read "Catholic") friends. I don't recall that we ever owned bicycles, although I knew how to ride one. We had roller skates and ice skates, wagons and scooters and sleds. To the horror of all our mothers, the boys on our street, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews alike, played "chicken" with

"Now that the kids have all grown up and moved out, Walter, let's hide."

John A. Lynch *lives in Framingham, Massachusetts. His "The Art of Giving" appeared in the February 26, 1999* Commonweal.

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the fire engines and would lie down on the pavement ahead of them when we heard the bells and sirens, but always jumping up and running off before we were in any real danger.

In the twenties and thirties the drivers of horse-drawn milk wagons delivered bottles to the door at daybreak, ice wagons hauled hundred-pound blocks which were split into twenty-five- and fifty-pound chunks and carried by iron tongs on the iceman's shoulder. If we were adept enough, we might be able to knock off shards to suck on from blocks still in the wagon.

My father shared a law office with an older attorney, "Colonel" Sheahan, whose brother was road manager for the Detroit Tigers. During the sandlot days of the Depression he kept us supplied with scuffed baseballs, huge scarred bats, and other equipment from the Tigers' surplus. At one time my brother Dan, a year older, owned one of third baseman Marvin Owen's discarded gloves and I played with the extravagant glove of shortstop Billy Rogell.

We had two younger sisters, Mary and Martha, and during our childhood my mother employed a series of maids, who doubled in house-cleaning, some cooking, and taking care of us children. I can remember having supper served rather formally, with my father summoning plates from the kitchen through a swinging door by means of a foot-operated bell under the dining-room carpet.

Help were older black women—Lulu and Mandy—and younger white women—one from Estonia, Sofie from Finland, and a runaway from Kentucky, Nancy Durham, plain and straight-haired, who preferred bare feet to shoes. Nancy was not more than sixteen when she appeared at the door one day looking for work, was taken in—no questions asked, no check with the police—given an upstairs back bedroom, board, and a little spending money. She remained with us for more than three years. If this was a little unconventional, so be it. The Depression did strange things to propriety and common sense.

The other white women also lived in, but the black women were day-help and traveled by streetcar from some faraway neighborhood that we barely knew about. Mandy was a hearty, big-chested woman who, when Mother was out of the house, chastened our mischief by locking us in a dark closet beneath the stairs that smelled of rubber galoshes.

Long after we were grown, after moving from Westminster, after college, after the war, my mother still brought in day-help for cleaning. Her mind had been made up long ago about minorities, but she was constrained with arthritis and she hung on for expediency's sake until one day when she had an encounter with a young woman, Linda, that ended all the mistress-servant foolishness. Linda announced that she couldn't come on the following Monday because that was "bump day." To my mother's inquiry and mortification, Linda said that was a day when her church, led by the pastor, went to downtown Detroit on the busy sidewalk in front of J. L. Hudson's to "bump white folks into the gutter." Linda was about my age and in her way charming, but she had to know when she came that day that she would be summarily fired. All she asked was carfare to get home, which I gave her and bade her good-bye, so she could disappear into Detroit's Lower East Side and await the poignant church-led assault on Monday. "Just forget whatever you heard," my mother said and walked slowly into the back yard, where she stood against the fence for a long time.

I remember photographs of my mother in her teens, a small girl given to plumpness, her pale face round, her lips thin. In her sixties she was not much over five feet tall, quite visibly shorter than in her fifties, and the plumpness, much of which she had lost in her middle years, had returned.

With it had come the arthritis that would leave permanent disabilities. Her twisted fingers looked as if someone had beat on them and they were welted and lumpy and bent at uncomfortable angles. In the kitchen I noticed that she had trouble handling pots. More and more, cereal boxes, milk cartons, screw-top jars, and tightly wrapped bread were beyond her. Her soft earth shoes massaged feet whose toes had painfully curled under. She walked with the help of a black cane.

I never saw bitterness between my parents, although my father commonly teased and my mother may have been annoyed, but she did not tease in return. Perhaps she was not mentally agile enough or lived life too seriously. In argument she tended to be trivial, but she would argue. She was essentially shy, sometimes moody, and could easily fall into melancholia.

If my parents were sometimes quarrelsome, neither was willfully mean or strident with the other. They held their anger in check. They respected each other's idiosyncrasies. They complemented and appreciated each other in ways that we did not discern or understand, nor was it our province to do so. We were sure they viewed marriage and family as a privilege and a trust. If somewhat over-disciplined, ours was a peaceful home.

In 1925, my parents purchased the cottage on Lake Oakland, where the family spent summers from school's end to Labor Day as we children were growing up. The cottage cost a thousand dollars. Fourteen years later, full of memories, it and all its furnishings were sold for slightly more than the original figure to a butcher from Royal Oak. Despite many improvements in the cottage, my father was never able to fix the leaky roof.

In the years at the cottage my mother never hiked to frog-laden Sashabaw Creek like the rest of us. She did picnic with us on the hill behind the cottage, however, and we laughed to see her crawl under the fence, which she did, as I remember, with considerable grace. She would swim from the dock at the lake's edge, but never went deeper than her chest. Once, she said, as she stood in shallow water in her high-necked, skirted, black bathing suit, a long-nosed garpike swam across her toes and startled her. She went reluctantly in the boat with my father. She never fished, though she cleaned our catch of bluegills and perch without a word

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when we were too young to handle a knife.

I realized later that the days at the lake were really no pleasure for my mother. The moments in the sun or feeling the breeze beneath the willows on the shore, dangling her feet from the dock or walking through the thick lakeside clover, hardly balanced the meals prepared on a balky kerosene stove, the clothes soaked in a galvanized tub, the floors swept of sand, the slivers removed, the sunburns soothed (my father's, too), and the tolerance shown for all manner of crawling, jumping, swimming, digging, and flying things. There were spiders, crayfish, mud puppies, a broken-winged blue kingfisher lying crumpled in a box, Johnny darters, frogs, turtles, gophers, snakes, dragonflies, stink bugs, caterpillars, and beautiful night moths among them, which we kept in pails and jars and makeshift cages. The first summer Nancy was with us she wriggled a piece of rope at my mother in the kitchen and said it was a snake. My mother was momentarily frightened and thought this was completely inappropriate and told my father so.

I remember a day when my father crawled silently along the shore on his belly through weeds and muck to catch a feeding muskrat in his hands. He snatched the animal into the air with a triumphant yell, his fingers firmly around its neck, the hind legs scratching at his wrist. He was forty-six at the time and my mother admonished him for his recklessness and for being a "showoff" when he carried the muskrat into the cottage, but I, being twelve, was proud. He told us that, at the Newport farm, he and his brothers had trapped muskrats and sold the pelts to a favorite schoolteacher. It was from him that we learned the names of trees and flowers and all the swimming and crawling creatures.

She wanted to visit again the streets of her childhood. But the streets were no longer there. In their place were massive batches of concrete and tons of steel, freeways, and ramps, and the exact location of her birth house could not even be determined.

While my mother feigned interest in spiders and crayfish, she displayed a natural liking for birds and kept a chart above her stove of those she had come to know. From a pocket guide "illustrated in color" which she bought at Woolworth's, she cut out their profiles and pinned them to the chart. In her quiet way she soon knew more of bird lore than all the rest of us. When we eventually left the cottage she took down her chart, folded it away, and kept it in her trunk of memories in her bedroom in the city.

The family moved to Grandville Road in Redford, a Detroit suburb, in 1940 when I was a freshman at Notre Dame. Twenty years later my wife and I were in Massachusetts with six children; a seventh was born after we had settled in. When my parents visited us in the East, it was the first airplane flight for both of them. My mother was seventy that year, my father seventy-one.

At Grandville my mother gained a front porch to sit on, and, on a good day, she would rock the entire length of the porch, about eighteen feet from railing to wrought-iron railing as her chair slipped sideward almost imperceptibly, a fraction of an inch with each forward motion and skidded an equal distance on the back stroke, so that by twilight she would have to rise and tug the rocker back to where she had begun. She would lean heavily on the chair as she tugged, her soft shoes shuffling along the concrete deck. She kept a keen eye on the neighborhood from her chair, and once was astonished when a dark stranger appeared leading a pot-bellied pig. It was far and away an improvement over the raucous fire engines of Westminster.

During one visit to Grandville, from my room at the top of the stairs, I heard her once at night. My parents were locking up and I listened as my father set the bolt and tried the knob on the front door. Formerly, at Westminster, where the banister from upstairs turned a corner and from where the view downward past the staircase window with its patch of stained glass ended in darkness, I had often heard them saying their evening rosary, sitting beside each other in the living room. Their harmonious petitions entered and echoed into every corner of the house.

"Look back," she said. "We've raised four children, put them all through college, and one has come through the war." (Dan, who had been ill with rheumatic fever in high school, didn't see combat but served in postwar Japan, came home, joined the Congregation of Holy Cross as a religious brother, and taught at Saint Edward's University in Austin for forty-two years.) Coming up the stairs she sounded tired and a little cross but talked on, as if life's accomplishments were not all that she thought had been promised her. Certainly she had ambitions she never realized. She regretted I had not been an officer. (My father had been a sergeant.) And Dan, having traveled that far, she reasoned, should have become a priest.

At the cottage, lying beneath the window where the moon streamed in and lit the old painted bureau, had my mother crankily but rightfully complained about how everything had gone wrong, how the pan beneath the icebox had overflowed onto the kitchen floor (had I neglected to empty it?), how someone had stepped on glass and cut a foot, and how she had been, most of all, alone, with my father at his office in Detroit? Did she plead with him: "I'm not suited for this. I have no friends here. I don't drive. I'm not able to get away"?

Did they make love in that room, later tiptoeing out to the bathroom, crossing the worn rug in the middle room, avoiding the red-lacquered chairs, the low wicker table, being careful not to squeak the doors? Mosquitoes hummed

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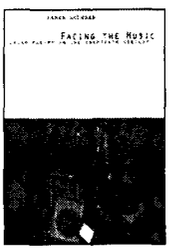

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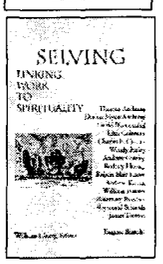

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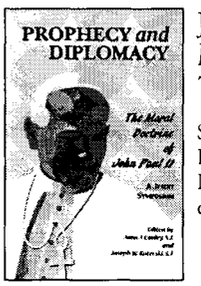

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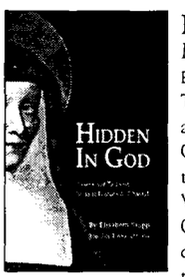

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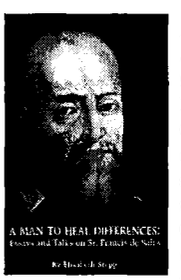

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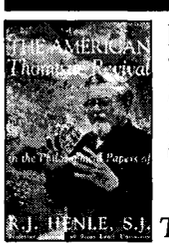

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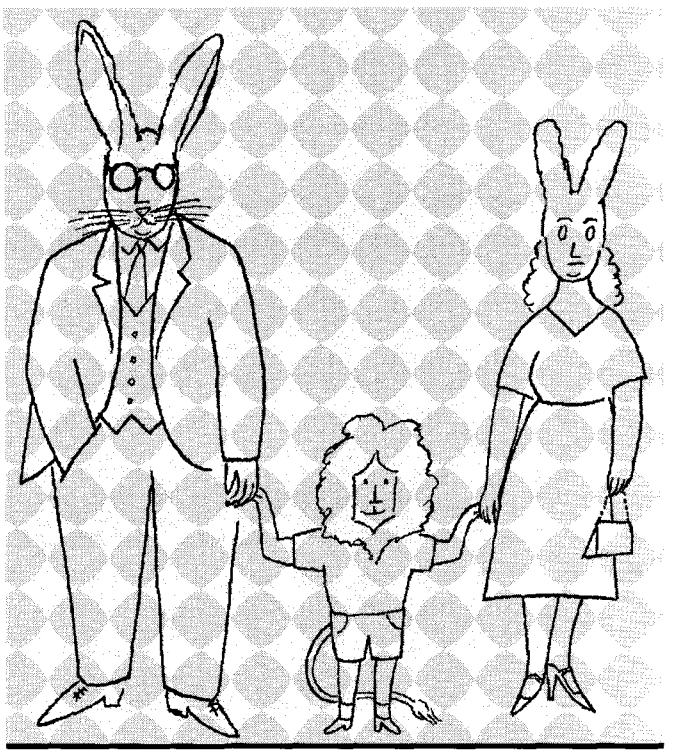
in the darkness of our rooms. Outside there would be the pervasive odor of skunk. Mice played in the kitchen at night. If it rained, we could count on the roof leaking and would all be up placing pans under the leaks and would return to our beds hearing the plinking in the pans, the drumming on the roof. Did they make love under cover of the rain?

I had never known exactly how old my mother was until her sixtieth birthday. She wouldn't tell me, and my father professed lamely that he didn't know. One time, she said, "If I tell you, then we'll both know," and looked at me slyly. And one day, in a later year, when we were alone, she told me that she was frightened of death. It was odd coming from her. I was visiting for a longer time than usual, and I spent more of it with her.

"I'm afraid of dying," she admitted. (She would live another fourteen years.) Then: "Would you hold my hand?"

I did, incautious as it was, because we were driving at the time through the streets of Detroit. Occasionally when I was home she would ask me to take her into the city and we would go east, then west, then south, past places familiar and unfamiliar, both recognizable and newly strange, and eventually downtown where she wanted to visit again the streets of her childhood. But the streets were no longer there. In their place were massive batches of concrete and tons of steel, freeways, and ramps, and the exact location of her birth house could not even be determined.

"My mind just wanders," she said. "I get so worn out. I find myself wondering what is on the other side, and I can't talk about it with your father." Her fingers tightened on my hand. "It doesn't matter," she said. "Let's go home." In silence, somewhere near McNichols Road, I felt her fingers slip from mine.



Surprisingly, my father died first. He had stopped going to his office, traveling the five miles downtown by bus and back, when he was seventy-nine. For several years he had been working a shorter day, in anticipation of retirement. He had done about everything he had wanted to do. His children had grown to responsible adulthood; he had known and loved nineteen grandchildren. (We had never known our grandparents, my mother's father having died in 1913, her mother in 1925, and my father's parents in the years between.)

On an early autumn Sunday, when he was several years short of retiring, we took a final trip to Lake Oakland. My mother was resting on the porch and we promised to be back by six o'clock. We walked along the creek bank, pulling ourselves through head-high alder, grown since we had last been there. Our shoes sank into moist ground and frogs zigzagged ahead of us. It was in this reach that my father had caught the feeding muskrat some thirty years earlier. We crawled around a fallen willow, and within the framework of its downed branches a colony of blue-fringed gentian bloomed, mouths flecked with pollen. We climbed upward to a field of tall corn, walked the edge, and came out on a dirt road. I was exhilarated and my father, although breathing hard, looked as good as I had seen him in years. We stood in the sun, admiring it all. I could have been ten or twelve, barefoot in the dirt, stamping to see the imprint of my foot, dust puffing up between my toes, warm beneath the sun and the vast unbroken sky. In memory, I spun on the balls of my feet, hopped crazily on my heels, then bent and gathered a few stones from the road to peg at the glistening, inviting, green-glass insulators atop the telephone poles, hearing the wires sing.

My mother's eyes were closed and shadows were lengthening when we returned. In the rocker she was barely marking time. Evening was drifting into the street and lights coming on in neighboring houses. My father brought out a robe and laid it across her lap and tucked it in around her legs. With one corner he covered her crooked fingers. I walked over to Outer Drive to bring home takeout dinners.

In 1971, my wife and I drove to Notre Dame for our son Tom's graduation, and on the way back to Massachusetts we stopped over in Detroit. My father, three months short of his eighty-third birthday, looked weak, was walking hesitantly, and doing a great deal of coughing. My mother said that he had lung cancer but wasn't aware of it and we should not bring it up. She apologized for not having told us sooner, but she had difficulty even acknowledging it. When I talked with him, I suggested that both of them would be better off in a nursing home.

"For one thing," I said, "you're both starving."

"I've brought it up, but your mother won't go. She wants to stay here."

With the difficulty she had getting around, my parents had been eating only two meals a day. My father tried to help out, but she wouldn't relinquish her kitchen. Her legs

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would no longer get her up and down the stairs, and in January they had the four-poster mahogany beds that came from her house moved down to the dining room.

"Your father doesn't want to go to a home," she said later. "He wouldn't be happy there." They were at an impasse, growing uncommonly irritable, speaking but failing to understand each other. I don't believe my father suspected the cancer, and I think my mother was wrong in not telling him. It would have given urgency to whatever decision they might make.

My mother gave me the doctor's name and I called him. "I want to know what is wrong with my father," I said.

"If you want to know, ask your mother," he replied.

I wasn't prepared for this rudeness and insisted that he tell me everything.

"Well, he has lung cancer. It's beyond treatment now. He is eighty-two years old, after all."

"Did you do a biopsy?" I asked.

"Your father's too old and weak for that."

"Doctor, he's coughing a lot. Can't you give him something to relieve that?"

The conversation ended on an unsatisfactory note, and my appeal to my mother met with a declaration of her complete trust in the doctor. He was her doctor, too.

I called Dan in Texas and suggested that he get an emergency leave and come to Detroit. My sisters and I agreed that our parents had to get out of their house and find someplace where they could be suitably cared for, but we had not been sufficiently persuasive.

"We've been down all the avenues," Mary said in desperation. Dan flew to Detroit, but had no more luck than we did and went back within a week.

Two weeks later my father was taken to the hospital and died there of pneumonia. There was no cancer. The diagnosis had been incorrect. The X-rays had been misread. The doctor was stunned and apologetic. My mother was devastated and never saw or spoke to the doctor again. There was no thought of a malpractice suit. Good people did not do that in 1971; we took our lumps.

After my father's death my mother sold the house with Mary's help and moved in with Martha and her family for nearly a year. While the house was still for sale, however, she had begun willy-nilly giving away to neighbors her heirloom French chairs that previously she so carefully protected with covering sheets when toddlers were in the house.

She did go into a nursing home when she left Martha's. Within six months she moved, and within another year, to yet a third home. She detested the homes, one no better than the other, she complained, and my sisters, who picked up her laundry and brought her extra food, were given to understand that she was not an easy patient.

When I visited her in the first home I would push her in her wheelchair around the block to admire the gardens and trellises and hanging plants. But her interest lagged and she sat impassively, gazing forward, her bent, useless hands in her lap. Sometimes I would bring my nieces and nephews with me and we would take pictures of them with "Mimi," but her response was minimal.

Toward the end, one day when I came into her room she did not immediately know me. The following day she recognized me but was confused, thinking I still lived in Indiana. "It's been three years," she said mysteriously.

"Yes," I agreed, aware that she was drifting.

"The Steiners were here last night," she whispered, "and the Quinns, but you haven't come until now." She turned on her pillow and began to cry. The Steiners I knew had passed away, but I was uncertain about the Quinns.

It was seven years between their deaths but it was like a month. I did not want to know that my parents were dead. I did not and do not understand death that easily.

"Where have you been? We used to be friends." Her right arm was tucked under the sheet and her left was spasmodically twitching. She lay in a fetal position, tiny and shrunken on the nursing home bed. Her face was round and small, with strands of white hair about her ears. Without her glasses her eyes seemed nearly blind.

"There's a woman who swears," she said, as if suddenly she had remembered something of importance. I had to lean forward to catch her words. "I don't like her."

We talked of the Quinns, Natalie and George, whose daughter Beth had moved to Arizona many years ago.

"Arizona," my mother sighed. "That's too far." She wiped her eyes on a corner of the sheet and said, "Natalie looks awful."

When she was finally asleep, I told the nurse that I was leaving. I stood outside my mother's door for a moment, looking back. The corridor was oddly empty: the traffic of nurses and carts had moved on. Then a voice came through the stillness, soft as a whisper, from where I do not know, a disappointed soul waiting for her Jesus, mistaking defeat for what was soon to be victory: "Lord, Lord almighty." Then, louder, drawn out and insistent: "Oh, Goddamnit. Goddamnit. Goddamnit."

I never saw my mother alive again. She died in March, three months before her eighty-ninth birthday, having moved from walker to wheelchair to bedridden confinement on the third floor of a nursing home, her muscles practically evaporated, at the end unable to hold up her head

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I

Closer to me than I
Am to myself, Eckhart
Said about God and yes,
At times I have felt
The world so utterly
Absorbed there was no-
Thing to see, no one
Seeing it. But mostly
I am always the same
Distance away, far
As memory is from
The first time, regret
And self-pity constant
Reminders of the I
Writing these words.

Robert Cording

and recognizing no one, her days completed.

It was seven years between their deaths but it was like a month. I did not want to know that my parents were dead. I did not and do not understand death that easily. I vowed not to kneel in that solemn parlor, where the dark-suited mortuary lackeys were standing at parade rest, a strange priest my parents never knew was leading prayers for the dead, and the closed-lipped mourners sat within the breath of too-perfect blossoms, sidewise glancing to learn by whom the garlands had been sent. (I thought my father in his time would have preferred scarlet bee balm and black-eyed Susans.) But I did kneel there and I saw my parents made up and dressed up, resting in their satin-lined caskets, clutching rosaries in their lifeless hands.

I took the family to my mother's funeral in Detroit, and coming back on the New York Thruway, we drove off at Utica and went north to my father's Newport farm. He had given me directions when I first had begun visiting from Massachusetts, but often I was flying and this was the first opportunity I really had to drive there, although I needed the aid of a clerk at a country store to get to the final turn. He knew the place, he said. He had heard his father speak of my father's family. The farm had been sold at auction to an absentee landlord after my Uncle Will, who lived on the farm, died. Since then, for all practical purposes, it had been deserted.

"The farm is gone," the clerk said, "so you won't be surprised."

"Gone?"

"Tore down," he said. "House, barn, all tore down."

"Who?"

"Scavengers."

We approached through exhausted, haphazard, weed-grown fields. Only a cellar hole of chiseled and fitted stone was evidence of any kind of dwelling when we parked the car and walked over the grounds. Newspapers, broken glass, and beer cans littered the basement and, in the darkest corner, a patch of snow remained. The ground had been dug up in places where rhubarb or roses or something thought to be of value had long ago been taken. The barn's stone foundation had been smashed, run into by someone's jousting truck perhaps, and stones removed. A few broken, moss-edged boards lay scattered where the barn had been, as if these alone had been too miserable to steal.

Scavengers, the man had said. Someone needed a door, a pair of hinges, a piece of siding, a window frame, a few old barn boards, stones to erect a new foundation. The country was abandoned to teasel, juniper, and old-field cedar. I walked through the fields where my father and his father together had walked. How to explain eighty years?

I wiped my face with my hand, finding tears. Wind scurried over the farm, a hint of more snow to come. Out of sight a bird called, an early arrival, perhaps a horned lark. I was only guessing: I could not name it. My mother would have known, had she been there.

I traveled down to a brook among dark maples, where the early skunk cabbage leaves were just beginning to appear. Ice was still tight in spirals along the banks. A place for cruising muskrats, I thought, but though I waited several minutes peering into the black water I saw none, nor did anything move except the wind.

Returning up the slope, I picked a solitary stone from the ground and weighed it in my hand; then, reaching back, threw it as far as I could across the land.

Saturday mornings at Lake Oakland, before the sun was up, with the sky streaked pink, we would be at the dock, untying the boat. Rowing out into the lake, my father at the oars, which made only light sucking noises in the water, Dan and I squatted in opposite ends of the boat. We would watch for low-flying herons along the shore, and somewhere hear gentle mourning doves in the breaking dawn. Oars dipped, we headed up to the mouth of Sashabaw Creek to fish.

Halfway down the hill to the lake, my father had planted an elliptical bed of red and white petunias for my mother. From the cottage door, by a trick of perception, it appeared perfectly round. I wish I could have done as much.

My parents are buried beside each other in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Southfield, Michigan, below a slight rise in the ground and in the shadow of a double-trunked white birch tree. □

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DIGNITY'S CHALLENGE

Can homosexuals feel at home in Catholicism?

Shawn Zeller

On any given Sunday in Washington, D.C., a group of Catholic exiles gathers. Because they have openly disavowed the church's teachings on homosexuality, they are not allowed to convene for Mass on church property. So the members of Dignity gather apart, at Saint Margaret's Episcopal Church in Washington's gay-friendly Dupont Circle neighborhood. Some come in pairs. Some are alone. Most, by far, are men, and most are white. Most, but not all, are gay. Some are friends or relatives of homosexuals.

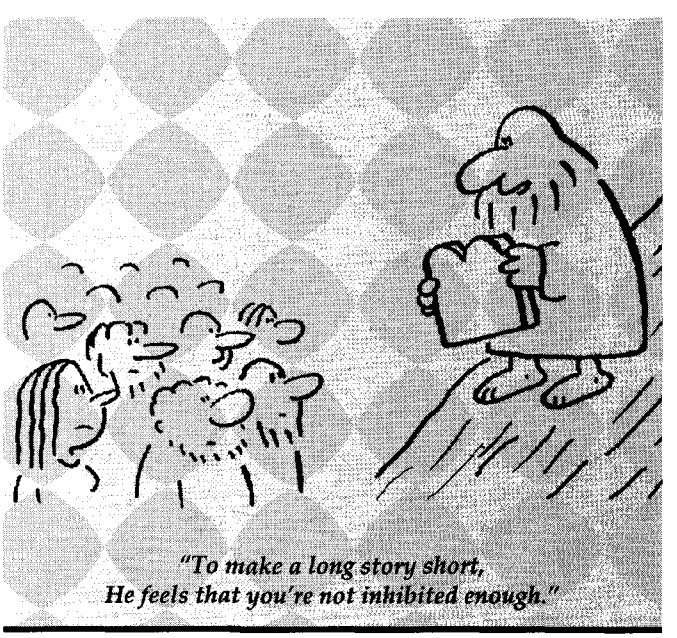
The parishioners list numerous reasons for their attendance. Some view Dignity as a social gathering place, where like-minded homosexuals can meet. Others view it as purely spiritual. It's a place where gay Catholics can reconcile their faith and their sexuality, they say. And many see Dignity, at least partly, as a political organization. Their goal is to persuade Vatican authorities to change the church's official teachings on homosexuality and to work with local, state, and federal governments on gay-rights issues.

To many Americans, the idea of a religious homosexual is an oxymoron. God and gays don't mix, they say. That perception has led many gay people to abandon religion, according to former Dignity president Robert Miailovich. But, he explains, Dignity members have held onto their Catholic identity. "We're Catholics because we say we're Catholics and we're not going to let anybody define us out. We define ourselves in," says Miailovich, sixty-one, a Dignity member for twenty-two years and a retired federal government employee.

Still, as Dignity enters its fourth decade as an alternative ministry for gay Catholics, the group's commitment to Catholicism is facing renewed strains. On matters of politics and sexuality, the group finds itself more at odds than ever before with mainstream Catholicism. At the same time, Dignity has struggled to bring in a new generation of gay Catholics. Its congregations are graying, and becoming more male-dominated. Lesbians, upset with the church for what they see as sexist as well as heterosexist policies, have abandoned the group in droves and joined more lesbian-friendly denominations or ceased to worship altogether.

Founded in 1969 by gay Catholics in Los Angeles, Dignity was an officially recognized church group until 1986. To that point, Dignity had never openly questioned church teaching. But in 1986, the Vatican issued a "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" and ordered dioceses to withdraw all support from groups like Dignity. The next year, Dignity countered with its own statement challenging the church's position. It argued that gay people can practice their sexuality in accordance with Christ's teachings. Dignity was then barred from church facilities in most dioceses. The church continues to hold that homosexuals do not choose their condition, but argues nonetheless that homosexual sex is sinful and that gays and lesbians should seek to lead chaste lives.

At its seventy-five chapters around the country, Dignity counts thousands of members unwilling to accept the church's view. Many chapters have opened lines of communication with diocesan officials in an effort to find common ground but, in many ways, the rifts have only grown deeper. Dignity has issued statements assailing the church's failure to ordain women and to approve the use of birth control. Some of its members have vocally criticized the church's opposition to abortion and the canonical regulation on priestly celibacy, although the organization takes no official position on either issue. And many Dignity chapters have rewritten sections of the Mass to eliminate what members view as sexist rhetoric. Dignity members were



"To make a long story short, He feels that you're not inhibited enough."

Shawn Zeller *is an assistant editor at the* National Journal.

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outraged a year ago when the Vatican ordered Father Robert Nugent and Sister Jeannine Gramick to cease their ministry to gay Catholics because it allegedly strayed too far from Catholic doctrine. Nugent and Gramick were the founders of the Maryland-based New Ways Ministry. (It continues to minister to gay Catholics.) "For many gay Catholics, unfortunately, that was the last straw," Miailovich says.

For those who've remained, "There's definitely an aspect of trying to find a new self-identity," says Father Christian Mendenhall, a fifty-year-old gay priest who left the active ministry in 1990. Mendenhall is now an assistant professor of drama at American University in Washington, D.C., but he still says Mass for Dignity's Washington chapter.

A Washington service earlier this year underscored just how far Dignity has moved from mainstream Catholicism. Parishioners were urged to refer to God in the terms with which they were most comfortable, a reference to the view that calling God "He" and "Father" is sexist. Likewise, at the offering of petitions, parishioners responded with "God hear our prayer" because, says Miailovich, the more traditional "Lord" is a "male imperial term." Mendenhall also skipped recitation of the Nicene Creed because many Dignity parishioners deem its terminology sexist.

The sermon's content and presentation also differed from those of the traditional Catholic parish. Mendenhall told parishioners to love themselves, homosexuality and all. We should "love the fullness of things about who we are, and that God already loves."

Overall, the Mass felt something like a group therapy session. Before the kiss of peace, Mendenhall encouraged the gathered to "hug the work of art that is sitting next to you." And before the celebration of the Eucharist, he walked the room offering the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. Several parishioners took him up on it, and he made the sign of the cross on the forehead of each while other parishioners laid their hands on the anointee.

"I think we try to cure or heal people who have had a lot of garbage laid on them in their lives," explains Miailovich. "We don't deny that sin exists, but our people have had that message in spades. What they need is the message that God is 'Yes,' that God is there for them."

"We don't deny that sin exists, but our people have had that message in spades. What they need is the message that God is 'Yes,' that God is there for them."

With the gay-rights agenda gaining currency in many states, Dignity has also expressed increasing anger with the church's active opposition to gay-rights initiatives. Dignity members in Vermont, for example, weighed in with the state legislature as it considered how to implement a December 1999 state supreme court decision that required Vermont to provide equal benefits and rights to gay couples as to married heterosexuals. Vermont state lawmakers passed legislation last spring establishing a system of "civil unions" for gay couples, and the state's Democratic governor, Howard Dean, signed the bill in late April. Vermont Bishop Kenneth Angell publicly opposed the measure.

Meanwhile, San Francisco's Dignity chapter helped publicize the nearly $300,000 that California bishops donated to promote Proposition 22, a ballot initiative that banned California from recognizing same-sex marriages. In December 1999, Dignity members had marched from San Francisco's predominantly gay Castro neighborhood to Saint Mary of the Assumption Cathedral and handed out leaflets protesting against the church's spending and its alliance with the Mormon church, which also backed the initiative. Despite such efforts, California voters approved the gay marriage ban on March 7 of this year by a vote of 69 to 31 percent.

"We really have felt that it's very important to be a presence and an authentic Catholic voice on issues that affect our community," explains Dignity's current executive director, Marianne Duddy, thirty-nine, of Boston. Duddy, who works part-time as a consultant to nonprofit organizations, thinks it is important for Catholic gays to show that church membership is divided on issues like gay marriage.

In that regard, the group has taken steps to form alliances with other liberal Catholics. In February, Dignity members participated in a panel discussion on homosexuality and Catholicism at a meeting of Call to Action, an Illinois-based progressive Catholic group. Dignity is also a member of the Virginia-based Women's Ordination Conference.

Duddy stresses, however, that not all of Dignity's interactions with the church hierarchy have been combative. She points to several meetings with Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law, where she and other Dignity members encouraged him to take a stand against antigay violence and in favor of legislation that would label such violence a hate crime. They also sought financial assistance from the cardinal for the group's charitable work with the homeless and with AIDS patients, and they urged him to implement fully "Always Our Children," the letter issued by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1997. It stresses that parents of homosexuals should treat their children with compassion. Though the cardinal made no promises, Duddy says the meetings were cordial and productive. New York City's Dignity chapter, meanwhile, was successful last year

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in persuading Cardinal John O'Connor to remain neutral on a state hate-crimes bill, which the late cardinal had opposed in previous years. The bill recently passed in both houses of the state legislature, and is set to be signed into law by George Pataki, New York's Republican (and Catholic) governor.

A few bishops have taken stands supportive of Dignity. The Archdioceses of Baltimore and Detroit both continue to permit Dignity to hold Mass at Catholic churches. Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton spoke at Dignity's last national convention on August 6, 1999, in Denver. "Dignity members feel very much marginalized by the bishops," he says. "I think it's important for the church to reach out to them and keep them connected. They are sincere in their commitment to the church."

Frank DeBernardo, the executive director of the New Ways Ministry, also urges reconciliation with Dignity. "I think the dialogue should continue. They are the largest gay and lesbian Catholic organization in the country, and the church needs to listen to what these people are saying."

But many in the church, like Father Jim Lloyd of New York City, stress that Dignity "leads people down the wrong path because it encourages the rationalization that if it feels good, it must be okay." Lloyd works for the controversial Courage program, an officially recognized church organization that helps homosexuals lead chaste and, if they want, heterosexual lives. The New York City-based group has chapters across the country, but is banned from some dioceses, which feel it treads too closely to the reparative therapy endorsed by some evangelical Protestants. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles, for one, bans Courage, according to Father Peter Liuzzi, who heads the diocese's lesbian and gay outreach program. Liuzzi says Courage's policy of working to help gay men "grow into heterosexuality" is risky since those men may marry, only to then find that they still harbor homosexual desires. "In my view," he says, "the cost of marriage is too dear."

Other dioceses have sought to win over Dignity members by setting up gay and lesbian outreach programs. The National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries counts fifty-five dioceses that now have outreach programs. That's up from just thirteen six years ago, when the association was founded, according to its president, John Good. He says the programs seek to help gay Catholics come to terms with church teaching and to make them feel welcome in the church. Good admires Dignity's efforts to work for change in the church but says, "I don't think the way they've gone about their advocacy is the best way to influence change. I think the fact that we work within the formal church structure, we are able to accomplish more because we sit at the table." Good said outreach groups have won greater funding for AIDS ministries, and have persuaded priests to speak out against antigay violence. California members have also weighed in on the church's support for Proposition 22, particularly its alignment with the Mormons. The Mormon church goes beyond the Catholic church in condemning homosexuality itself as sinful.

Still, the arrival of these church-outreach groups has outraged Dignity members in many dioceses. In Chicago, for example, the introduction of an outreach program a decade ago decimated the local Dignity chapter. Half of its membership bolted for the outreach program, recalls Martin Grochala, a member of Dignity/Chicago. Although much of the anger has blown over now, Grochala says that there was a lot of animosity. "There were friendships destroyed and a lot of hard feelings."

Dignity has also struggled to find its place in the larger gay-rights movement. Many gay activists are openly skeptical of religious homosexuals. "There's a segment in the movement that's fairly antireligious," acknowledges Thomas Fleury of Dignity/Vermont. "They hear that I'm a practicing Catholic and they roll their eyes and shrug their shoulders and can't imagine that anyone would want to worship as a Roman Catholic." Last year, a controversy arose among planners of the gay pride 2000 Millennium March on Washington this April 30, over whether to stress faith as one of several march themes. Some even condemned the use of the term "Millennium," calling it a purely Christian marker of time. Fleury says the antireligious attitude is typical among gay activists since so many organized religions consider homosexuality sinful.

Several Dignity members told me they often volunteer time with their local gay-rights organizations. Many members of Washington, D.C.-based PFLAG—Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays—attend Dignity services throughout the country. Dignity's national chapter has joined the National Religious Leadership Roundtable, an arm of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), a major Washington-based gay-rights group. The roundtable seeks to help gay religious organizations share strategy for working within their own denominations, and also seeks to mobilize religious gays on political causes. "We want to amplify the voice of the pro-gay religious movement," explains Urvashi Vaid, the executive director of the NGLTF Policy Institute. "We want to have different voices speaking out for gay rights."

Dignity's aggressive advocacy and alignment with other gay-rights organizations further lessens the chance of reconciliation with the church, according to skeptics. Still, Dignity leaders insist that they cannot compromise on principle. "When we talk about wanting to dialogue and trying to reach some understanding with the church, it's not on bended knee asking for favors," insists Miailovich. "It has to be equal to equal."

But that's impossible, according to Father John Harvey, the founder of Courage. Dignity's position can never overrule or compromise church teaching "based solidly on Scripture and natural law," he says. If there is to be dialogue, he adds, it must begin with the premise that the "church's position is correct and is not going to change." Whether or not dialogue will end with that is the unanswered question. □

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Paul Baumann

TO CATCH A THIEF

'Small Time Crooks' & 'Mission: Impossible 2'

Something has happened to Woody Allen's face. Allen was never a pretty picture, but his famous nebbish looks and wimpish physique did convey a certain elfish charm, a Groucho Marx-like lasciviousness, and a nervous little-guy's determination to succeed. In *Small Time Crooks*, Allen needs at least some measure of these contradictory qualities, but his face fails him. There's too much basset hound and not enough imp in it now. He is probably too old to bring off the role of Ray Winkler, a comically inept ex-convict and aspiring bank robber, whose very incompetence saves him from one calamity after another. Whatever the reason, even more than usual Allen seems merely to be pretending, merely standing in as the hapless Ray. He's just a mouthpiece for the clever jokes and nicely turned dialogue. Allen is oddly lifeless even when the oneliners are as sharp as the lines in his face.

Small Time Crooks is a return to the verbal high jinks and slapstick comedy of Allen's early years. Fans will be reminded of *Bananas*, *Take the Money and Run*, *Play It Again, Sam*, and other inspired moments in higher lunacy, where the director/writer/star packed a hundred perfectly turned jokes into ninety minutes of unpretentious plotting. Also true to form, Allen has found an ideal female counterpart in Tracey Ullman, the versatile comic actress who plays Ray's wisecracking wife, Frenchy. Ray and Frenchy have what might politely be called a bantering relationship, with Frenchy's hilarious and devastating putdowns reducing her benighted spouse to sputtering indignation. It is no surprise that Ullman, vaguely reminiscent of Mia Farrow in *Broadway Danny Rose*, fully inhabits her part as a tough-talking working-class New Yorker who can't believe what her moronic husband and his even more dimwitted buddies are up to. Ullman's Frenchy is a small triumph as well as a small-time crook.

Much of the humor of *Small Time Crooks* relies on the sheer stupidity of its characters. Writing stupid characters who are also funny is not easy, but neither are those characters likely to hold our interest for very long. They don't even hold Allen's interest, as he quickly dispenses with the crew of bumbling numbskulls surrounding Ray, and brings on a smarmy Hugh Grant to romance and betray Frenchy, who aspires to the better things in life once the couple can afford them. Ray's idiot friends (including the wonderfully wan Jon Lovitz) are sorely missed when the action moves upscale and uptown.

Allen's abandonment of the film's Three Stooges-like subplot does allow him to give more screen time to Elaine May, who plays a character (named May) so ditzy that she makes Yogi Berra and Casey Stengel sound like geniuses. Whether May is revealing Ray's bank-robbing scheme to the police or charming a prospective suitor with a near-lunatic weather report, she walks through the picture with the blissed-out expression of Michael Dukakis behind the wheel of an army tank.

Too much of *Small Time Crooks* is taken up with the trauma of Ray's and Frenchy's efforts, once they have money, to make it into the Social Register. This drama of social climbing and *nouveaux riches* seems almost antique, a slightly updated version of Judy Holliday in *Born Yesterday*. Grant, however, is no William Holden and Allen no Broderick Crawford. That the rich are crass and deceitful is hardly news. That they are not as soulful as the film's wayward heroes is trite sloganeering, as are the film's platitudes about how money can't make us happy. The whole class dynamic, from Frenchy's naked social ambitions to Ray's stolid allegiances to the simpler pleasures, is a page out of Hollywood's version of the Depression. Do working-class Americans really want to emulate the cultural pretensions and social manners of the rich? In an era when popular culture threatens to sweep away all such distinctions, the situation seems reversed, with the wealthy desperate to appear hip, if not hip-hop.

The larcenous couple

Speaking of popular culture, what more is there to say about Tom Cruise and *Mission: Impossible 2*, this summer's biggest hit? Much has been written about Cruise's mercurial coiffure and the film's stunningly beautiful damsel-in-distress/jewel thief, Thandie Newton. Cruise, who also produced this formulaic James Bond-like thriller, hasn't lost any of his boyish charm or any megawattage

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from his multimillion-dollar smile. As Ethan Hunt, the dextrous leader of a team of secret agents battling the forces of evil on an inexhaustible expense account, Cruise is still rappelling down skyscrapers and aping Cyrano de Bergerac, thanks to *Mission: Impossible*'s patented peel-off latex masks. In this installment of the series the latex masks are used more promiscuously than ever, and the directing duties have been handed over to John Woo, who made a name for himself with violent but balletic action movies in Hong Kong. Woo's influence is evident in Ethan Hunt's mastery of the martial arts, the film's slow-motion fight scenes, and the fiery demolitions of countless automobiles, many of them (happily) shiny new sport utility vehicles. There are also some nifty motorcycle stunts that children should *not* attempt at home. Woo, considered a virtuoso by some, keeps the carnage piling up, the camera moving in vertiginous arcs and sweeps, and the hero and heroine tantalizingly apart. In other words, he knows when to muss up Cruise's hair and when to part it neatly.

This genre depends on the manifest villainy of its bad guys. In this regard, *Mission: Impossible* 2 has some luck with Dougray Scott, who plays the sinister Sean Ambrose, a former colleague of Hunt's who has gone over to the dark side. Ambrose is ruthless in the way great cartoon meanies are ruthless, right down to his gruesome habit of paring other people's fingernails a knuckle or two short with a handy device he otherwise uses for snipping off the ends of cigars. Betraying not an ounce of human decency, he plans to kill thousands by releasing a lethal virus for which only he has the antidote. A sure moneymaker, he figures. But Ambrose also has a more human, if not a gentler side. He is the former lover of Ethan Hunt's new paramour Nyah Hall, the aforementioned jewel thief. True to his higher mission, Hunt must use Hall, featured throughout in a series of fetching outfits, to bait his trap. Nothing personal, you understand, just business. Ambrose furrows his brow terrifically upon learning that his former mistress has teamed up with his arch-rival. Like all the villains in the *Mission: Impossible* movies, he doesn't seem to understand how hard it is to say no to Tom Cruise.

Most of *Mission: Impossible* 2 is set in Australia, although it could easily have been California, the coast of Maine, or a back lot in Burbank. There is a brief sequence that takes place in Seville, replete with thundering flamenco dancers, pyrotechnical religious processions, and Moorish arches. Seville seems the more intriguing location, and one wishes the Mission Impossible "team" had spent more time ducking in and out of dark alleyways in that venerable city. But that wish may be simply the result of so much rhythmic foot stomping and too many aerial shots of Sydney's famed Opera House.

It is tempting to think of movies like *Mission: Impossible* 2 as a version of the potlatch. Tens of millions of dollars are burned up for the moviegoing public's vicarious pleasure and psychological catharsis. In the potlatch, of course, the extravagant sacrifice was an enactment of social solidarity. In the movies, similar extravagance only fuels childish fantasies of omnipotence and Manichaean notions of how evil exists in the world. Still, Cruise and Woo are to be complimented for their wanton destruction of that sacred suburban icon, the sport utility vehicle. Sometimes violence is a good thing. □

Paul Baumann *is* Commonweal*'s executive editor.*

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ART

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

THE EPIC IN THE ORDINARY

The painting of Jacob Lawrence

The artist Jacob Lawrence died in Seattle on June 9. Reading his obituary in the *New York Times*, I looked up at the poster over my desk announcing a 1992 exhibit of his work at the Phillips Collection in Washington. It shows a painting with the number fifty-seven scrawled in the lower right corner. *57* depicts a black woman, head bent, laboring over a large washing trough pushing soaking clothes with a long pole. Against a background of gray, green, and black rectangles, an abstract rendering of wash hanging, she stands out, a stable triangle, in a white coverall. Her red washing pole, held straight up, seems to anchor her in place. Yellow, orange, gray, and black amorphous-shaped garments in the trough echo the colors of the abstract and rectangular ironing board, clothes hamper, and shadows behind her. She is at once sorrow and stability. Sadness and gratitude wash over me as I gaze at her.

Washing machines replaced the wash tub and their mechanical agitators replaced women poling their clothes in steaming, sudsy water. During World War II, washing machines were forfeited to the war effort, however, and my mother, like the woman on the poster, poled clothes in stationary tubs in our basement. A small child, I watched as she stirred and lifted my father's work clothes and my sister's diapers. Of course there was a difference: my mother was doing our family's laundry. The woman in Lawrence's painting was doing the laundry of another family, Southern, white, and rural; she was cheap black labor ready at hand. When I look at the poster, I see her plowing and plunging her pole, but I also see my mother.

My sadness rises at the thought of this never-ending and backbreaking labor; my gratitude lies in its demise. No one uses poles today; no one slaves over hot tubs; even the poorest go to the laundromat, in the United States, at least. Race, region, and class separate the woman in the picture and my mother, yet in my mind's eye, they are silent sharers in this common labor.

Is my comparison inappropriate, an accident of biography? Lawrence's image, after all, is not of a Chicago housewife, but a stark and simple abstract painting of a black woman living in the residue of a slave society. Or is Lawrence inviting us to meditate on all human want and suffering? He certainly worked on a larger canvas (actually gessoed masonite and tempera) than political protest and racial advocacy. Though his images are of the black experience, his work invites us to consider that this is, in many respects, everyone's American experience. For Michael Kimmelman, the *New York Times* art critic, Lawrence conveys "a sense of the epic with an appreciation of the ordinary—or perhaps it is more accurate to say that he appreciates the epic in the ordinary." And it is true, as Kimmelman goes on to note, that this allows Lawrence "to paint horrific and momentous events without rant or pomposity....His art values fairness and accuracy at the same time that it abstracts big subjects into precise symbols" (November 14, 1993).

The picture of the laundress is designated *57* because it is fifty-seventh in a series of sixty paintings Lawrence created in 1941. Earlier efforts included multipicture series on the lives of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman. *The Migration of the Negro* recounts the vast movement of Southern rural blacks to the urban North after World War I. (The caption on *57* reads, "The female worker was also one of the last groups to leave the South"—indeed, the stable shape of her white coverall anchored by the red pole suggests she may be there still.) In contrast, *1* in the series is all vitality and movement; a black multitude streams in diagonals toward train platforms marked "Chicago," "New York," "St. Louis." (Lawrence's caption reads, "Around the time I was born, many African Americans from the South left home and traveled to cities in the North in search of a better life. My family was part of the great migration.") Seeing this picture at the Phillips show, I viscerally grasped Chicago's troubled race relations at the time I was growing up in the fifties.

The image of the train and train station recurs in the series with ever-larger crowds in each picture, and concludes with number *60*, a solid band of travelers impatiently standing at the platform's edge, a horizontal band of form and color anticipating the train that will speed them away. This image of decisive movement alternates with others: a family cowering in the corner of their simple, wooden house as they consider the consequences of flight—the cowering captured by a flattened perspective; or the standoffish attitude of Northern blacks rendered by the looming figures of a well-dressed couple. Lawrence's work is pointed but not tendentious. Any viewer can see in the sixty pictures, when they are gathered in one place (half are owned by the Phillips; half by New York's Museum of Modern Art), the fear- and hope-filled story of all who left the known "old" world for the unknown,

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and not always welcoming, new one.

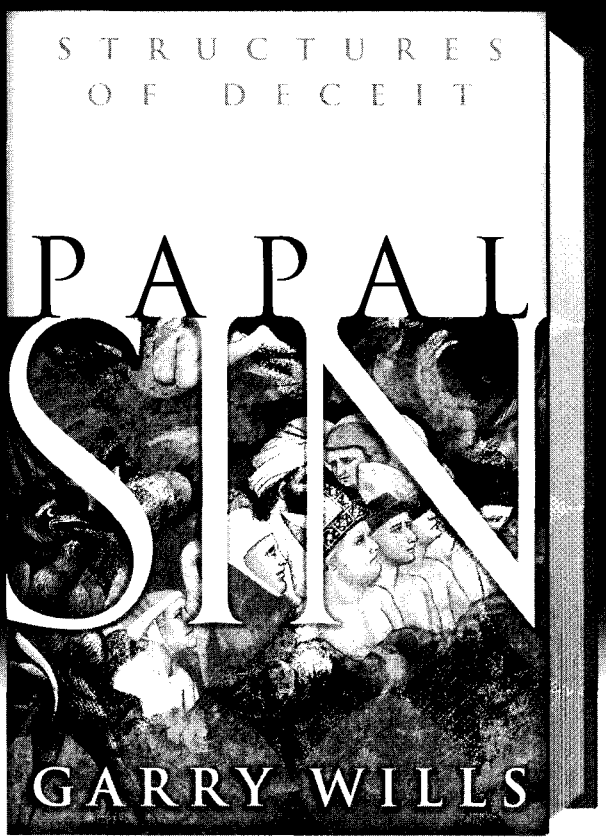
History and story were powerful elements in the art of the '20s and '30s when Lawrence was a student at the Utopia Children's Center in Harlem and later as a high school drop-out at the Harlem Art Workshop. Recall the WPA post office mural projects or the works of William Johnson, Diego Rivera, Ben Shahn, and Jean Charlot (some of whose drawings continue to appear in *Commonweal*). Lawrence belongs to the post-Harlem Renaissance, post-WPA generation of painters. His work is figurative, but it is not social realism—abstract forms and colors shape the figures depicted in *The Migration of the Negro*, figures traversing bleak Southern landscapes (poverty, segregation, exploitation, drought, lynchings) and eerie Northern cityscapes (jobs, housing, education, yes, but also discrimination, beatings, and riots). This story is never sentimental or merely engaging because Lawrence's compositional genius renders powerful emotions and searing events not simply by visualizing them but evoking them.

Hung together, the sixty compositions (each 18 x 12 inches, some vertical, some horizontal), bring to mind other stories and other images: Stations of the Cross and the small pictures and portraits that make up large medieval altarpieces. Such visual narratives violate the taboo in much of modern American art against depicting and finding moral meaning in arduous labor, fearful and uneasy flight, suffering, hunger, courage, and death. Yet these never fail to open the mind and move the heart in the hands of a great artist. Jacob Lawrence was among that number.

Jacob Lawrence worked throughout his long life (1917–2000) as an artist and teacher (he was professor emeritus at the University of Washington in Seattle). A retrospective of his work is scheduled for the Phillips Collection in 2001, and a seventy-two-foot-long mosaic that he designed will soon be installed in New York's Times Square subway station. □

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels *is* Commonweal's *editor.*

From Pulitzer Prize–winning author Garry Wills, a revelatory assessment of the modern papacy.



In a work that is sure to spark heated debate, Garry Wills takes an unflinching look at the recent history of the papacy and its ongoing struggle to face the truth about itself, its past, and its relations with others. Wills follows historical patterns of distortion and evasion, "structures of deceit," and offers acute insight on such issues as:

- **Discrimination Against Women:** The questionable reasoning behind current justifications for upholding ancient views of women as inferior and ritually impure.
- **Celibacy:** Why Pope Paul VI stifled discussion on the topic during the Second Vatican Council.
- **We Remember:** How a genuine effort to express sorrow over the Holocaust in this recently released document was marred by the Church's continued denial of its actions during that time.

While Wills is critical of these and other matters, he also reminds us of the positive potential of the Church by turning to some of the great truth tellers, like Saint Augustine and John XXIII.

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Bare ruined choirs?

Papal Sin
Structures of Deceit
Garry Wills
Doubleday, $25, 326 pp.

Eamon Duffy

The Catholic church, Garry Wills believes, is locked into "deep structures of deceit" by an overblown papolatry, whose determination never to admit error dooms the modern papacy and along with it the whole church to a fundamental dishonesty, "the cumulative product of all the past evasions, the disingenuous explainings, outright denials, professions, deferences, pieties, dodges, lapses, and funk." All this saps honesty and, by inflating the church's claims beyond reasonable bounds, helps create among educated Catholics, in Cardinal Newman's words, "a habit of skepticism or secret infidelity as regards all dogmatic truth." With provocative irony, Wills titles the final section of this denunciation of papally driven deception, *Splendor Veritatis*, "The Splendor of Truth."

Wills's specific targets are, on the whole, a predictable round-up of liberal Catholicism's usual suspects. These include the church's sorry record over the Jews, and the aggressive and overbearing manner in which the nineteenth-century papacy opposed modernity and had itself declared infallible. But most are issues of sex and gender: the papal prohibitions on contraception and abortion, the church's practice and teaching on the indissolubility of marriage and on annulment, the exclusion of women from the priesthood, clerical celibacy and its consequences. As Wills sees them, these deceits result in clerical hypocrisy, the sexual exploitation of women by priests, widespread active homosexuality among the clergy, and pedophilia and its coverups.

On some of these issues Wills writes compellingly. An appalling chapter on the refusal of church authorities in Dallas, Texas, to take seriously or act on reports of sexual abuse by local priests illustrates the misery that can flow from the self-protecting determination of an institution to suppress scandal without eliminating its causes. He dwells powerfully also on the gap between the theoretical justifications for celibacy, in terms of spiritual heroism and availability to others, and the sometimes shabby deceits by which men ill-suited to it maintain the fiction of celibacy. Though I found myself dissenting from much of the detail of what he had to say on the current attitudes of the church toward the Jews, he rightly targets the inadequacies of the Vatican's Holocaust document "We Remember," whose unappetizingly defensive tone stands in such sharp contrast (though this came too late for Wills to comment on it) to the open-hearted imaginativeness of John Paul II's words and actions during his recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Not in a liberal mood

And Wills makes one telling theological observation. Those who maintain that the church's teaching on such issues has never changed, he argues, are compelled to subvert tradition, by inventing new arguments and justifications for their chosen positions as the old reasons become indefensible. So, he suggests, the real reason for the exclusion of women from the priesthood was that they were believed to be inferior or at any rate naturally subordinate to men. Now that this can no longer be acknowledged as a justification, it is claimed that the sex of the officiant at the altar is iconic, without which the priest would not be perceived to act *in persona Christi*. Similarly, according to Wills, clerical celibacy was imposed on the church at large because even married sexual activity was believed to defile the purity of the ministers of the sanctuary. Now that this denigration of the dignity of the marriage bed is no longer acceptable, the rule of celibacy is justified by the

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allegedly greater availability of the celibate for universal love. Such "jerry-built contrivances" are "shoved under" tottering doctrines and practices to keep them in place, and the result is "the quiet corruption of intellectual betrayal." Whatever one thinks of Wills's particular examples, he is certainly right in his claim that what passes for "traditionalism" in the church is often in fact an authoritarian insistence on the status quo, liable to be subverted or at any rate troubled by proper attentiveness to the complex reality of the tradition.

In the end, however, there is something repellently illiberal about Wills's angry liberal certainties, his wholesale and unqualified conviction that every right-thinking Catholic must agree with him, and that the positions he rejects can be held together by nothing except rank tyranny and the intellectual equivalent of quantities of chewing-gum. Every issue he discusses is open and shut, and he finds in the standard works of biblical commentary or popular history on his shelves unchallengeable proof of his own views. Since, then, the Apostles were not bishops, Peter was not the first pope, the laying on of hands was merely a solemn form of Jewish commissioning for any responsible job, therefore hierarchy and priesthood are matters of mere ecclesiastical organization and there can be no reason to exclude women from the priesthood. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

History for Wills, as for his model, Lord Acton, is an arsenal of cautionary tales, demonstrating again and again how all those mean old guys got it wrong. The history of the papacy in particular is an endless saga of tyranny, crassness, and self-interest. Wills makes much of the disturbing story of Pius IX and his godson, the Jewish boy Edward Mortara, baptized by a Christian nurse while dangerously ill, and subsequently taken from his parents and educated as a Christian, ending his life as a devoted Catholic priest. Wills is understandably scandalized by this heartbreaking story, but the case for him has no nuances, no moral ambiguities. Mortara was just a scalp on the papal teepee, a testimony to the moral blindness of Pius IX. Wills has no sense that to leave a technically Christian child in a non-Christian home might actually have presented a real dilemma even to good men in another age, that a nineteenth-century pope might sincerely have conceived his responsibilities in terms other than those that seem self-evident to a twenty-first-century American. If any parallels to the case of Elián González occurred to Wills, he does not mention them.

The limitations of Wills's approach are on display in his discussion of "Marian Politics." For Wills, the Catholic cult of the Virgin Mary is essentially a ghastly mistake, propagated by the papacy, which has idolatrously exalted a creature in the place of her Lord, oppressed women, denigrated sexuality, usurped the proper role of the Holy Ghost, and infantilized the clergy. Mary, for him, "is the mother of Jesus' weakness, not his strength," and traditional Catholic exegesis of the Cana story, notably that of the present pope "eager to foist his view of the mediatrix on the revealed word," has got it "exactly backward." Wills betrays no sense at all that a millennium and a half of Marian devotion, art, and theological reflection might be something other than a blind plunge into misunderstanding and alienation, that the figure of Mary might have offered the Christian world a legitimate vehicle for the exploration of a multitude of themes—the place of the feminine in the church, the relationship between nature and grace, the cooperation of the creature with its creator, the historical rootedness of the messiah, and the role of nature and nurture in his human formation. Wills takes us on a walk round the art galleries of Florence, in search of bad theology. Pausing in front of Botticelli's *Coronation of the Virgin*, an exquisite celebration of the transfiguration of human vulnerability by grace, shrinking vernal nature made immortal by the Incarnation, Wills sees only a piece of papal propaganda (though the picture was not a papal commission). God the Father, he notices, is wearing a papal tiara, "a comparison of the pope to God." Before Orcagna's representation of the Apostles at Pentecost, gathered round the statuesque figure of the Virgin as the dove descends, Wills tuts in disapproval, because the Apostles appear to venerate the Virgin, not the Spirit. He seems blind to the astonishing theological complexity of this image of the church, as male Apostles bow in deference before a strongly feminine figure. Indeed, in Botticelli's archaistic version of the same scene, which Wills must have walked past in the Uffizi, the Apostles reel and cringe in disarray as the fire falls, while in the midst of them the Virgin gazes upward in prophetic rapture, her prominent belly pregnant with the church's future, her hands raised in the traditional "orante" position like a priest's at the altar, an unforgettable theological vision of the church which eludes Wills's reductive analysis.

To a Catholic living in Britain, Wills's book seems symptomatic of the profoundly polarized state of American Catholicism. Most intelligent Catholics will share some of Wills's concerns, and all will surely applaud his insistence on the need for truthfulness in the church. Yet it is hard to know what to make of a

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Catholicism so profoundly at odds with itself. Wills recently published a book titled *A Necessary Evil: A History of American Distrust of Government*, in which he defended the role of federal authority. But distrust of the church's government, and of the church's past, looms everywhere in the book under review. It is of course prudent not to take officials, even Christian officials, at their own estimation. In the end, however, Wills's critique of the present state of the church is a monologue, which attributes no worth to opposing positions, and which envisages no function or motive for ecclesiastical authority except ignoble and overbearing self-interest. Cardinal Newman, one of Wills's truth-telling heroes, thought the life of the church involved a complex interplay—and tension—between the elements of prophet, priest, and king. Prophecy meant intellect, theology, and its demands; priesthood meant the prayerlife of the church and its spiritual and intuitive dimension; while the royal element of the church was its organizational and historical dimensions—structure, hierarchy, tradition. For Newman true Catholicism involved an endless struggle to hold these differing energies in balance, privileging none over the others. He would have hated this book. □

Eamon Duffy *is Reader in Church History in the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Magdalene College. He is the author of* The Stripping of the Altars *and* Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes, *both published by Yale University Press.*

LEADER WITHOUT A FOLLOWING

The Other American
The Life of Michael Harrington
Maurice Isserman
PublicAffairs, $28.50, 449 pp.

James T. Fisher

In the 1980s Michael Harrington occasionally spoke at Friday night meetings at Maryhouse, a Catholic Worker community located on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Critics and admirers alike who gathered around the lectern after the talk to pursue further "clarification of thought" were often invited to call or visit Harrington's office at the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) headquarters on Union Square. The same locale that served as the springboard for Dorothy Day's radical journey (as described in her 1938 memoir *From Union Square to Rome*) was the final stop on Harrington's reverse pilgrimage from Catholic radical to socialist agnostic. Yet Harrington's appearances at Maryhouse reflected his stature as an accessible and generous leader of the American Left.

These qualities of openness and engagement are vividly captured in Maurice Isserman's superb biography of the man whose best-known book, *The Other America* (1962), was credited with the "discovery" of poverty amid a postwar affluence so widely touted that many believed social injustice had been rendered obsolete.

Harrington grew up in the 1930s in comfortable neighborhoods in the West End of Saint Louis and the adjoining suburb of University City, where his family's middle-class Irish Catholicism and civic-mindedness placed them near the center of a vital community. From the Jesuits at Saint Louis University High School, suggests Isserman, Harrington acquired "a sense of moral gravity" rather than a specific ideological outlook. The child of staunch Democrats, while at The College of the Holy Cross Harrington was for a time enamored of the conservative Republicanism of Ohio Senator Robert Taft. This "Oedipal reaction," as Harrington later described it, was supplanted by a more meaningful encounter with leftist thought during a one-year stint at Yale Law School. As a graduate student in English at the University of Chicago, Harrington experienced his initial "indecisive apostasy" from Catholicism, but returned to the church long enough to serve a memorable tour of duty with the New York Catholic Worker in the early 1950s. At nightly sojourns to the White Horse Tavern and on various picket lines he continued to mingle with secular radicals. In 1952, however, he shocked fellow Catholic Workers by dramatically brandishing a membership card in the Young People's Socialist League. When he finally left the Catholic Worker and the church for good, Dorothy Day was reportedly relieved that theology, not a woman, was the issue, though according to Isserman the young Harrington rarely lacked for female companionship as Catholic or socialist.

Harrington's wanderings were not unlike those of many relatively privileged white American males in the postwar decade. Yet Isserman shows how Harrington's quick and agile mind, coupled with his middle-American qualities, propelled him to the forefront of the socialist movement at a time of rather modest competition in the field. Given his charisma and the "evangelical pitch" of his oratory, his success was no surprise, but Isserman also explores "the gulf that had opened between his personal qualities—of which so many people thought so highly—and the character of his politics, which did not inspire the same universal admiration." Harrington showed a great devotion to sectarian infighting, a particularly fruitless occupation for an acolyte of Max Shachtman, leader of one of the numerous splinter groups that fought over the slim socialist pickings of the 1950s. When a younger group of student radicals emerged in the 1960s, the still boyish Harrington was ideally situated to guide them, but leaders of the fledgling Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) failed to pass the Shachtmanites' anti-Communist litmus test. Isserman's detailed treatment of Harring-

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ton's struggles with Tom Hayden over drafts of the Port Huron Statement (the historic 1962 manifesto of SDS) is gripping. Harrington's insistence that the young militants were naive about the Soviets was surely accurate, but his residual sectarianism would limit his effectiveness in the New Left during the momentous decade to come.

The Other America, a work driven, according to Isserman, by Harrington's vision that the "alternative America of intellectuals and students and artists and his Greenwich Village neighbors, and the excluded America of the poverty-stricken and the dispossessed could unite in coalition with a democratic labor movement," was also published in 1962. Without mentioning socialism in the text, Harrington offered an analysis of poverty that was both reasoned and impassioned. The book helped to shape the antipoverty agendas of both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and Harrington himself worked briefly with Sargent Shriver in the planning stages of LBJ's War on Poverty. It was a heady experience for a bohemian Socialist who suddenly became, in the words of Harrington's occasional patron Robert Maynard Hutchins, "the only man ever to get rich off of poverty."

Harrington overcame the psychic toll of success but remained haunted by internecine warfare on the Left. When the Socialist party peevishly tried to sabotage George McGovern's bid for the presidency in 1972, Harrington finally resigned his membership, alleging that "the historic party of Eugene Victor Debs and Norman Thomas is today doing the work of Richard Nixon." In the 1970s Harrington finally assumed Thomas's role as moral leader of the non-Communist Left, as cofounder of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and its successor, the DSA. Though he never found the mass base for "conscience politics" that he had long sought, Harrington's "moderate, pragmatic radicalism," Isserman argues, exerted real influence within the Democratic party. The Reagan years were another story. Harrington never understood why so many formerly Democratic voters embraced a leader whose policies he believed to be both "insane and cruel." In response the Democrats began their long retreat from issues of deep concern to Harrington, while embracing an "identity politics" with which he was never fully comfortable. Isserman suggests that Harrington's ability to "speak American" was one of this native radical's greatest gifts, yet his unwavering devotion to socialism occasionally limited his recognition of other forms of American discourse—from the utopianism of SDS to Reaganism—that were more appealing to segments of the nation than his own claims.

Maurice Isserman is a leading historian of the American Left who provides the full ideological context for Michael Harrington's socialist journey. He shows how Harrington surmounted the "Old Left" infighting of the 1950s and 1960s—virtually imperceptible to outsiders—to emerge as a revered leader of democratic socialism in the 1970s with a moral authority that assumed international proportions. Isserman also takes Harrington's religious life seriously, treating his apostate Catholicism not as a vestige but as an ongoing source of his humanistic imagination. While undergoing treatment for cancer in 1985, Harrington informed a cousin that after thirty years of atheism "he still deeply loved the Catholic church and found its rituals immensely beautiful and comforting." He claimed that if he died on the operating table and wound up in heaven, "he was going to accuse God face-to-face of mumbling to humankind." Out of such concerns has sprung much theological reflection, but that was simply not Harrington's line of work. In many ways he was a very straightforward person whose fidelity to a political vision shared by relatively few was the measure of his vocation as a witness, if not a prophet. □

James T. Fisher *teaches American religious history at Saint Louis University. His latest book is* Catholics in America *(Oxford University Press).*

APPROACHING THE UNKNOWABLE

Being Dead
Jim Crace
Farrar, Straus & Giroux $21, 196 pp.

F. González-Crussi

Among book titles, surely *Being Dead* ranks with the most intriguing. The visitor to the bookstore or the public library, ambulating through the stacks and catching a fleeting sight of the title, cannot but stop and wonder. Is this one addition to the dauntingly prolific race of "How To" books, if books they be called? What folly! Who can teach us that which no one has ever experienced and come back to tell about? Who, indeed, can expound on *being dead*? This is the one condition for which no instructors, no teachers exist. The one role that all of us, without exception, will one day be called to enact, but to which we shall come as ignorant neophytes. Always, and all of us, without exception, must face this reality. No theoretical foreknowledge here, and no empirical savvy, either.

For death is not empirical, but "metaempirical," as philosophers have remarked with their pretentious language. They mean that death is not an experience, properly so called, but they find themselves at a loss for words to say what it is, this thing that transcends all possible experience. They must invent new terms that are themselves unsatisfactory, since no language can have words for what is fundamentally ineffable, undescribable, and beyond possible comparison with objects or phenomena of the empirical realm.

The curious reader takes the book in his hands and glances at the jacket: *Being Dead*, by Jim Crace. Is the author per-

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haps a metaphysician, since it belongs to that species to discourse on things that are not known, cannot be known, and which, in any case, if they were known, would probably make no difference to most of us? Or is he perhaps a theologian? Mystics and ascetics have been telling us for ages that the goal of life is to learn how to die. But we know, of course, that this is just a manner of speaking, since there is no possible learning here. The reader is therefore prepared to hear solemn speeches on resignation or sober exhortations to fortitude, when, surprise!, the lowermost line on the front of the jacket makes it all clear. The full title reads: *Being Dead: A Novel.*

A novel: not a technical, biomedical work, not a philosophical treatise, and not an anthology of religious meditations. Instead, a work of fiction. But is it not true that any work setting forth propositions on being dead, whether philosophical, theological, or scientific, is necessarily a work of fiction? And the converse is also true: any novel taking as its central theme the condition of being dead, will inevitably foray into the arid plains of metaphysics, the lofty realm of religion, or the unforgiving, pitiless spotlight of biomedical science.

Being Dead is all of this, as compounded by the craft and the imagination of a masterful novelist. The style is agile, precise, and vigorous. Words hit their target directly and unerringly. Images are colorful, evocative, forceful. Jim Crace, who has already won many literary awards, reasserts himself this time as supremely skilled in the difficult art of the novel. Technique is not the least of his accomplishments, and this novel displays it to the point of virtuosity. The story, which forms the sustaining framework, and the very *raison d'être* of the traditional novel, takes on a more modest function here. It seems wrong to judge *Being Dead* by its storytelling. A critic would be misguided who concentrated his attention on the plot, the pace of its development, its climax and denouement, or the expectations or surprises that it may afford the reader.

Story there is, nonetheless: two middle-aged zoologists, husband and wife, on a sentimental trip to the beach where they had their first erotic encounter, are surprised by a robber, who murders them. The dead couple are left lying in the dunes. There, the cadavers slowly rot and deliquesce, incongruously frozen in a gesture of caress that cannot fail to evoke the somber links between eroticism and death. Then, the reader is presented with a series of gripping still-lifes, all rendered with exquisite art, in which the inanimate bodies are gradually dissolved, returned to dust, devoured by crabs and seagulls, tunnelled by insects, reclaimed by the life forms of the seashore, in a spectacle that is at once grandiose, fascinating, and frightening. And against this awe-inspiring background, there are flashbacks to the earlier life of the protagonists, without much regard for a linear chronological sequence. The novel thus acquires not merely a visual quality, but a distinctly cinematographic tone reminiscent of Alain Robbe-Grillet and the *roman du regard*. But even this comparison seems out of place: Crace is not classed with any literary school; he creates a school of his own; one that, in my view, is going to continue deserving praise for a long time. His novel does what only the highest form of literature can do: it mesmerizes the reader by the deployment of powerful images, which in turn force reflection long after the book has been put down.

Crace cannot tell us what being dead means. No one can. This is one of the infinite contradictions of the human condition: to be by nature curious, and to be condemned never to know. Never. We cannot even imagine, let alone see, this "beyond." But the novelist comes by and sets about collating a criminal act, two victims, their decomposing corpses, a few disjoined memories of their lives, and the desperate attempt of the victims' daughter to drown her existential anguish in sex. And by artfully arranging all this, the novelist seems to tell us that, if we pay close attention to the surroundings of death, we shall perceive absolutely nothing of death itself, but our vision of life—that other mystery—will be wondrously enhanced. □

F. González-Crussi, *pathologist and writer, lives in Chicago. His latest book is* There Is a World Elsewhere *(Riverhead).*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank last November and April were diverse. But he immediately oversimplifies their positions, making it easy for him to criticize their supposed views.

Along with this oversimplification, Mandle commits several other errors. His argument on poverty relies on questionable assumptions, and he conflates arguments against corporate globalization with antiglobalization in general. In the process, he fails to address the demonstrators' real targets, the IMF and the WTO. Curiously, his arguments end up being nearly as critical of free trade as those of the so-called "antiglobalizers."

Mandle's argument that free trade is good for the poor rests on a table that correlates higher per capita GNP and HDI (Human Development Indicator) with higher per capita exports. The problem is that while both per capita GNP and the HDI are good for assessing the average level of development in a society, they are not adequate for determining the real level of poverty in a particular country. That is, the HDI (and per capita GNP) of a country can appear higher than it is if the upper and middle classes are larger or doing better than the upper and middle class of a comparably poor country. What is masked by these statistics is the growing disparity between rich and poor in these countries, and in the world. While the ratio between the incomes of the world's richest 20 percent and of the world's poorest 20 percent was 30:1 in 1960, that ratio increased to over 70:1 by 1995. Furthermore, according to the World Bank itself, the worldwide

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poverty rate has held steady in the past ten years, even though trade has steadily increased. More subjective World Bank data, based on 60,000 interviews with poor people in sixty developing countries, state that the poor generally feel that they are worse off now than they were before.

Mandle does not provide any proof that high exports caused the higher GNP and HDI. Perhaps it was the other way around. Or, perhaps there are other more important intervening variables, ones that have to do with circumstances of culture, geography, and/or history. Finally, not all international trade is necessarily free. The most successful exporting countries, such as Japan, China, and the "Asian tigers" have had tremendous success with international trade without it being "free" since they extensively protected their own markets.

What the globalization protesters oppose is the special rights and privileges accorded to corporations that ordinary citizens do not have, such as the ability to move to any part of the globe, to invest irresponsibly, to demand access without suffering the restrictions of local laws governing the environment, workplace safety, or rights. In short, what they oppose is the globalization of corporations on the corporations' own terms.

It is the IMF and the WTO that are driving this form of corporate globalization, by making sure that third-world governments implement "neoliberalism" as their guiding social and economic policy. That is why they have become the primary objects of criticism for the protesters. Mandle fails to respond to their critique. Instead, he criticizes environmentalists and labor unions for linking regulation with free trade. In actuality, international trade and financial institutions have already made this linkage by trying to dismantle most domestic regulations.

Certainly those who protest corporate globalization are critical of free trade, but, as Mandle himself suggests, there is merit to these criticisms. For example, he mentions the need for governments to aid workers in making transitions as countries develop economically; the need for global capital market regulation; and the need for international agreements in environmental protection and worker rights.

If the defenders of corporate globalization would only pay more careful attention to what its critics are actually saying, perhaps we could have a real debate on the issue.

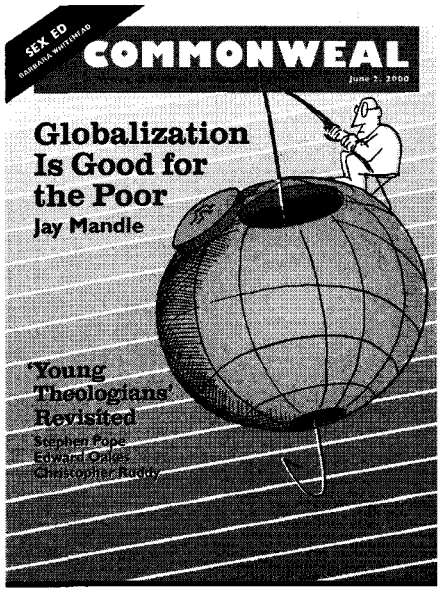
GREGORY WILPERT
New York, N.Y.

The author replies:

I thank Gregory Wilpert and Martin McLaughlin for their stimulating responses to my article.

My paper acknowledged that the people who demonstrated in Seattle did not speak with one voice. Wilpert maintains that I oversimplify the position of the Seattle anti-WTO demonstrators, but I continue to believe that "one element that links these groups is the belief that international trade is injurious to the poor and of benefit primarily to the wealthy." As I read them, both Wilpert and McLaughlin share this attitude.

My view is that international trade is good for the poor because it promotes growth, and that growth in turn is the only way to tackle the injustice of mass poverty in the third world. Trade raises a society's income, permitting increased wages for workers. Rather than a threat, globalization should be seen as a weapon in the fight against impoverishment.



I also called for policies to reduce currency and financial market speculation, to support workers who are dislocated as industry takes root in the third world, and to negotiate labor and environmental standards. But this should be done without holding trade hostage to those talks. My point is that defending trade does not make it necessary to be a neoliberal defender of unregulated markets.

I support job retraining and a system of income maintenance for workers who are dislocated by expanding trade for the same reason that I support such programs for workers who lose their jobs because of advances in technology. Society as a whole—in the case of trade, the global society—benefits from both advancing productivity and increased global sales. Both make available more goods and services than would be the case in their absence. Each, however, is also disruptive, creating innocent victims. Technological change creates new opportunities, but shuts down others. Trade means more jobs in industries that successfully export, but reduced employment in others. I don't think there is any way to avoid these realities, but I do think that the costs should be borne by the entire community, not by its most vulnerable members.

Wilpert claims that World Bank data show that the "worldwide poverty rate has held steady in the past ten years." I have in front of me the most recent World Bank study on the subject. It shows a reduction in the poverty rate in East Asia, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East/North Africa between 1990 and 1998. Only in countries in transition from communism did the rate increase. Interestingly, the reduction in poverty was greatest in East Asia, where trade growth was the most dramatic. Similar studies reject the argument that globalization is associated with increased income inequality. Readers interested in looking at the figures for themselves can find

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them in "Assessing Globalization" at the World Bank's web site, *http://www.worldbank.org*. At the site, click on "briefing papers."

What disturbs me is that leading spokespersons in the antiglobalization movement advocate a shift to greater self-sufficiency, although both economic theory and empirical experience point in the opposite direction. In doing this they at best are risking the well-being of those in desperate need, and at worst are supplying cover for protectionists in the United States intent on shielding themselves from competition in order to earn monopolistic profits.

JAY R. MANDLE

Gays & the scouts

Having read both the May 19 editorial ["Scout's Honor"] and the June 16 editorial comment in the Correspondence section on the case of James Dale and the Boy Scouts of America, we have to make a brief comment. The whole question of James Dale's qualifications to be a scout leader seems to boil down to his ability to perform in view of his homosexual orientation. Nowhere in the initial editorial or in the editorial reply was there any mention of the Catholic church's teaching: "They [homosexuals] must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided." We are, of course, quoting from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2358.

GEORGE AND ELLEN CURRAN
Glen Mills, Pa.

Leahy's reading list

Dennis O'Brien's article, "Vermont's Leahy" [June 16], was very interesting and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I am sixty-four years old and have lived twenty-seven years in a suburb of Washington, D.C. Because of the latter, I suppose, I have always followed politics closely. The number of politicians I have truly admired could be counted on both hands. Senator Leahy is one. Former New York Governor Mario Cuomo is another. I learned from reading O'Brien's article that Leahy, like Cuomo, has a passion for Teilhard de Chardin. The article says that Leahy is a voracious reader, was a close friend of Henri Nouwen, and has read *The Phenomenon of Man* many times. I heard Cuomo once state that he kept a copy of Teilhard's *The Divine Milieu* on his desk and reread it frequently.

As Joseph Brodsky once said, "If we chose our leaders on the basis of their reading experience and not their political programs, there would be much less grief on earth."

EARL REICHERT
Burke, Va.

Prep schools & God

As a former private school and current Jesuit school teacher, I must respond to Michael McGough's article "God and Man at Prep School" [May 19]. In my experience, private nondenominational schools exist simply to educate the wealthy while offering little coherent moral guidance. If there is a vision, it is an afterthought. The mission statements so popular among these schools are generally bland and indistinct and composed in response to criticism about the schools' vacuous elitism. Some faculty members may bring their own values to the school, but, if the institution does not elicit a common vision from its faculty, it will not convey that vision to its students. If Catholic schools cherish the values of faith, hope, and love, and public schools adhere to the values of democracy and citizenship, what values do independent schools invoke?

MARTIN KILBRIDGE
Rochester, N.Y.

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AS I LAY JOKING

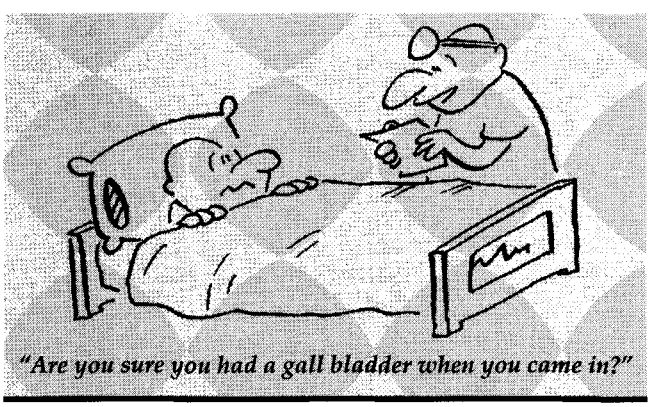
Robert G. Hoyt

During a recent routine visit, my doctor placed two pairs of educated, sensitive fingers on the two sides of my neck and drew a tentative conclusion. To test it he sent me to get a sonogram, then an MRA. Both suggested that I had a 70 percent blockage in my right carotid artery, 90 percent in the left. The carotids channel blood to the brain; I was told that a 70 percent blockage presents a tolerable risk, but 90 percent means you're a lot more likely than the next person to have a stroke and die, or, worse, become a vegetable.

Duly warned, I checked out two surgeons and chose one, in large part for his deskside manner: he chuckled when my bearing asked for that response. At his behest I took more tests: an EKG, "blood work," another sonogram, a stress test. Met the doctor's staff: all friendly and efficient. At the appointed hour (7:45 A.M.!) I went breakfastless to the hospital's ambulatory surgery unit, got a room, donned the appropriate garb. Met the two backup surgeons and the anesthetist, all friendly and capable of chuckles. (I tested by asking one of them to remind their boss that the carotids are on the *side* of the neck, it's the jugular that's in the middle.) By 10 o'clock I was being wheeled into the O.R. and rolled onto the table. Gently.

Though they didn't register at the time, there must have been a couple of needle jabs that benumbed parts of me and put me into some kind of trance. I had planned to check whether the faces above me were focusing on me or on their luncheon plans, but it's hard to do so with your eyes closed. On the anesthetist's request, however, I was able to count from 1 to 10, then backward from 10 to 1. Then again. And again. It got boring (or I wanted to be cute to the last), so I switched tongues: "*Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq...*" No chuckles. Tried again: "*Eins, zwei, drei, vier...*" Heard the anesthetist say something to the surgeon. And that, I learned later, is when an element of suspense entered the story.

It seems that I was not only slurring my words, in all languages, but slowing down, and this meant that not enough blood was getting through to my brain. If this persisted I would soon lose not only my patches of French and German, but also my command of English, down to "Mama" and "Dada," plus maybe how to blow my nose. My six-and-a-half-year-old daughter Sarah would not wish to tempt me again into a game of Tickle Torture. After sixty-five years of nicotinization I'd *have* to quit smoking: Nobody would give me a light.



"Are you sure you had a gall bladder when you came in?"

The problem rose because the arterial blockage was even worse than the pre-op testing had revealed. My slurring told the surgeon there wasn't time to keep cleaning it out, so he created a bypass to channel more blood upward and save my French accent, and quite possibly my life. Then he finished the job and sewed me up.

Outcomes: Because I had to have a transfusion, having lost a lot of blood, I spent an extra night in the hospital, for a total of two. As I write, ten days or so after going home, the stitches are out, my neck is still sore, the wounds are healing, I get a shot of pain from time to time, and my voice is gravelly. A happy ending, or nonending.

Let us now shift gears. For me, this story is worth telling not only because I have a (mostly passive) role in it, but because it has a moral, having to do with money. By my count at least fifteen highly trained people worked together to save my language and/or life. Add the rent for my room and the O.R., a unit of blood, the use of high-tech equipment, the new tubing in my neck (a part of me will be forever Gore-Tex). Put it all together and it would probably cover the down payment on a Mercedes. All right, pay for a Honda. But I don't have to worry about it. Through a family connection I have comprehensive medical coverage from an insurer that ordinarily, if sometimes slowly, pays all or most of what providers bill it for.

It strikes me that anyone in this enviable fix has to reflect at least in passing on all those out there who have no health insurance, or lousy insurance, who may have well-clogged arteries or other conditions that can't be cured by yoga or an apple a day, who don't routinely visit their doctors because they don't have doctors, who don't have much if any choice among surgeons and hospitals, and who therefore suffer avoidable but debilitating or fatal strokes or other grave ills, even though most are a lot younger than I and are much more needed by their families.

Ergo: our health-care system is wonderful. But it isn't fair. Tell it to Congress. □

Robert G. Hoyt *is* Commonweal*'s senior writer. He has interesting scars.*

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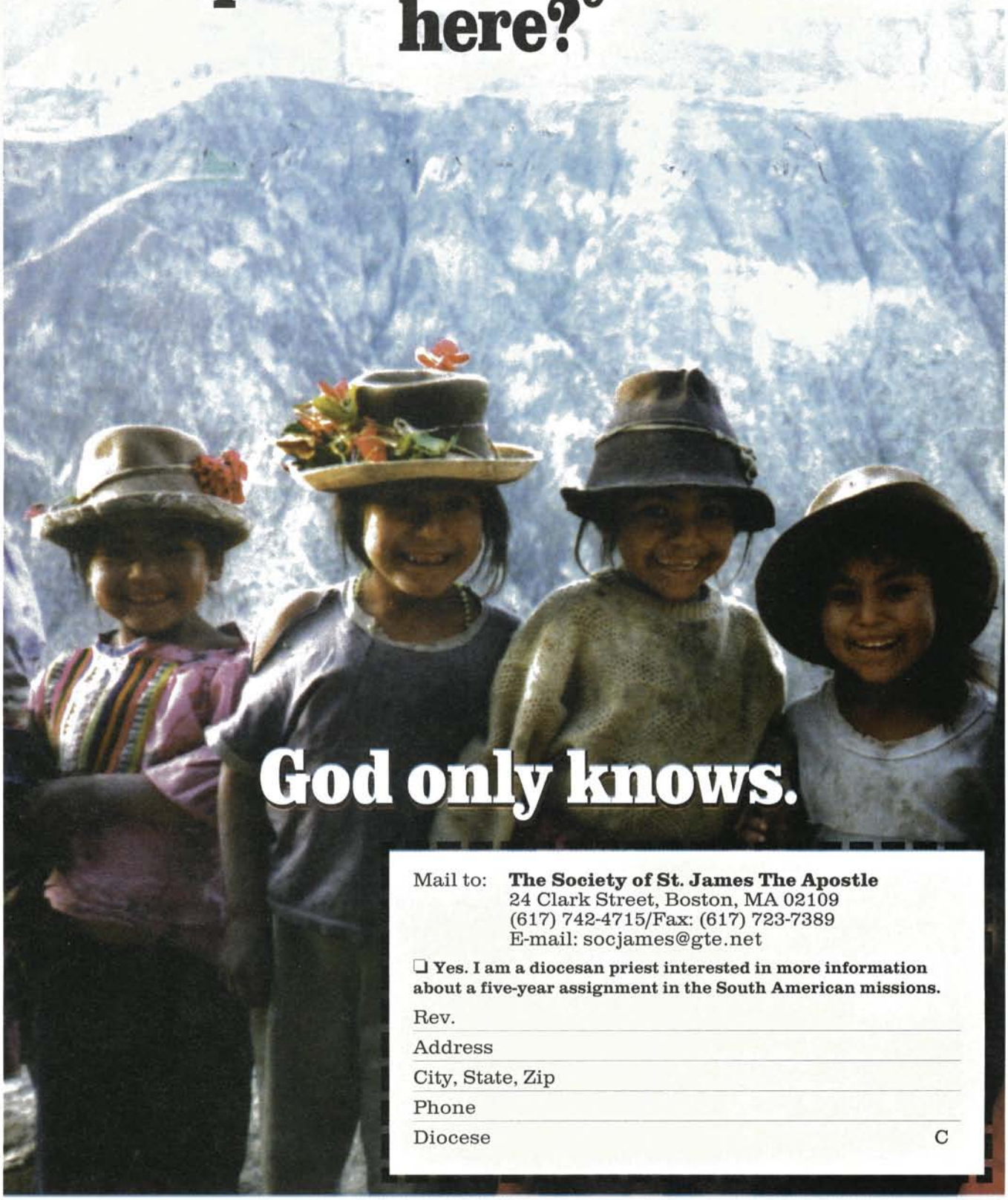

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